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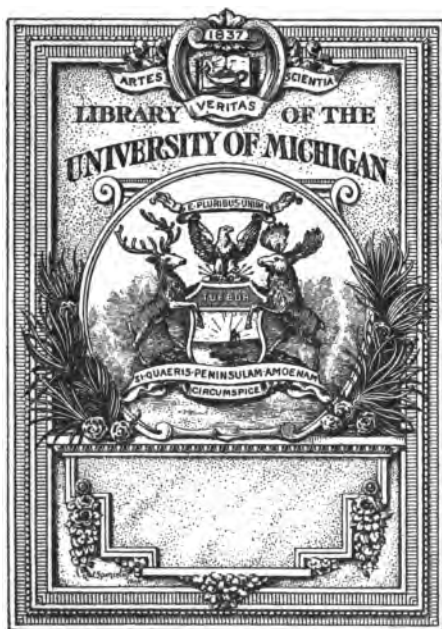
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## EPISODES



## THE BLACKMAILER

LORD CHARLES is a very pleasant, comfortable sort of man. You meet him in the shadiest haunts of dissipation, quite unperturbed and casual, and equally casual and unperturbed at the most exclusive houses. He turns up everywhere unobtrusively, and has never been associated with a scandal. He talks to the most disreputable people as if he and they were simple, innocent children of domesticity, and would assume a perfect sympathy with an archbishop. Business men feel in talking to him that his and their modes of life are identical. He does not say very much, and all his friends pronounce him "such a good chap." There is a little house at Roehampton, where his private cab occasionally stops, which represents something like the equivalent of a mor-

## *Episodes*

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ganatic marriage, and Lord Charles is, I believe, an excellent (if morganatic) husband. He is very well known in Paris, and finds gambling an agreeable stimulus and an assistance to the digestion. But he is quite casual about that also.

Lord Charles' profession is and was that of living at the rate of twice his income. It is rather a fatiguing profession, and it is to that his friends refer when they say poor Charles has a lot of trouble.

On one occasion he contemplated a different profession, almost as old perhaps, as his own.

Sir John is a proprietor of something or other, a Member of Parliament and of an eminent political club, and the possessor of a signed photograph of a fifth cousin of royalty. That is about all that anybody knows of him : I do not think he is cultivated for his social qualities, and his tastes seem to be negative.

It happened that Lord Charles had a sister who went slumming, and in the course of her slumming heard the name of Sir John ; what

### *The Blackmailer*

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she heard about him is not relevant ; it was by no means a pretty story. Such as it was, she told it to her brother, who was interested. He made an expedition to South London, and returned thoughtful and with a document. But he persuaded his sister not to tell the world what she had heard.

What puzzled Lord Charles in the first place was the question how Sir John could have been such a fool as to write the incriminating letter ; still, that he had written it was clear. If it had been a forgery the writer would have acted on it long ago. But the next reflection was that the letter proved Sir John not a nice man—in fact a man who would have been called, even in Lord Charles' intimate set, a blackguard. He reflected that it was infamous such a fellow should be received into decent society, simply because he was rich. That was rather unfair to society ; but thinking of money, it occurred to Lord Charles that he owed money all over the place (which meant to his friends—lawyers and people did not count), and that he was



## *Episodes*

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threatened with eviction from the morgannatic little house at Roehampton. Certainly Sir John would be kicked out of the eminent political club and the House if the world knew what Lord Charles knew, and royalty's fifth cousin would regret the signed photograph. He pondered over these things as he lunched at his club and strolled up Piccadilly to his rooms.

It is fair to say that Lord Charles had never done a mean thing in his life. He had never consciously told lies of an enemy or too much of the truth of a friend. He had never borrowed without intending to repay, or betrayed a secret. He was withal good-natured, would listen to anybody's grievances, and gave presents to his nephews.

Nevertheless, Lord Charles put these questions to himself: When there were so many undiscovered blackguards, what did it matter to the world if Sir John continued to be one of these? Would it not be a good thing if some of the money of a brute like that were diverted

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*The Blackmailer*

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to the pockets of an excellent and amiable person? If he made up his mind not to tell the secret in any case, would it be very base to plunder the Egyptians? Not to bargain, but to ask a loan?

You see, the possibility of plundering a man he disliked, without hurting anybody else, had not occurred in his life before. I repeat my assertion that he had so far never done a mean thing. Lord Charles called on Sir John and showed him the letter. Sir John entreated, made excuses, and abased himself, and appeared to Lord Charles the most contemptible hound he had ever seen. Sir John offered him money.

"God damn you," said Lord Charles, "what the devil do you mean? If you were not such a cur, I'd——"

What he did was to walk out of the house. He did not tell the secret; he had made up his mind not to do so. Nor did he speak to Sir John again.

It is rather a tame ending, not at all cynical.

### *Episodes*

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But you see Sir John was so very offensive a cur, and Lord Charles was a little fastidious. It was wholly impossible to ask such a man for a loan.

## STRAY

I WAS loafing in the Park in the hot weather one morning, and sat down on a seat. A girl who passed by set me thinking indolently but with a certain alertness, for the day was as yet fresh. Something in the gait as she drew near and much in the face as she glanced down on me set me on a train of familiar imaginings. One is not prepared for such a girl as one walks about London. I had a glimpse of a small regular face, and a very sensual mouth. I don't suppose she was twenty. The eyes looked with an easy humour upon the world; the glance on me expressed a mildly interested and untroubled indifference. She wore her clothes with distinction, but you knew they were clothes and not part of

### *Episodes*

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her. And she walked like an unobtrusive, unaggressive queen. The expression of the whole of her was gaiety, gaiety not forced, nor spasmodic, nor noisy, but gaiety overflowing, mellow, all-irresistible. I felt as I rose and followed her she was part of another world. She had nothing in common with plutocracy, and popular culture, and getting your money's worth. She had nothing to do with this amorphous mass of streets and houses. She lived when London was the town, long ago, before even the Germans came in with their hatred of boets and bainters. . . . There was no atom of discontent in her movement; clearly the gods had given her a lot rare in modern England.

Such were my fancies, and I will tell you the facts. I was convinced I could speak to her without offence, if heaven gave me the least excuse. I believed I was the man in all London who could really understand this girl; I believed I was middle-aged enough to give her an idea of it. She must have had another

training than the common ; we could be rational without vulgarity. She dropped something or other ; heaven was kind and we were soon conversing. I learned this : she was the daughter of a solicitor, lived in West Kensington, went to Broadstairs every year, had never been out of England. Those were the facts—given without the asking—which met my fancy ; but not one jot of my fancy had I to resign. Any other girl so brought up one would have felt was outstepping her conventions in a vulgar spirit. This one was merely impelled by a purely reasonable insistence on reasonable pleasure, a purely frank response to sympathy she felt instinctively. I gathered that for education she had been to a few plays and had read a few novels. She told me these things readily, correcting a misconception she inferred.

Then quickly she passed to generalities—in itself a curious course for her as she described herself. Not one jot of my fancy had I to resign, not a whit less queenly, less gay, less

## *Episodes*

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sensual was she. She was a woman of Stuart England re-incarnate ; there was no doubt of that. Her attitude towards life, her unaffected rule of taking the moment, the background of humorous pathos—she was unique of my acquaintance. Probably I do not make the idea of her plain, I fear it much. She was difficult to seize ; but one thing was clear ; she used her circle of worthy respectable young men as she should have used a Court. I know she shared in their pleasures and observed their humours and laughed, and now and then had a cry, and so was done with it. I know one or two dissolute, quaint, delightful people who would have appealed to her—but alas ! She was not discontented—only once did she say she wished people were less pompous and reserved ; she knew no other sort of men, she thought life pleasant, and she lived, I know—but alas ! the men she knew could never know her.

The note of it all was pathos. The obvious

pathos : she would never be middle-aged as I am, but she would be old. She was born to be a coster-girl or a king's mistress, and it would be hers to break the heart of a stock-jobber and to marry an essential attorney. Should one wish her an awakening, and what might follow? I do not know. But behind it was a pathos not obvious, the pathos that is behind all gaiety and beauty not absorbingly self-conscious : she was so entirely the creature of sensation, and sensations are so brief—read it as you will.

You have told me we are all made by circumstance, and will tell me there was some circumstance in her life's history which made her too as she was.

It sounds inevitable, but allow me the old "throw back." I will believe an ancestor, passing many generations, came out in her—an ancestor who ruffled it, and was wittily and reasonably unrestrained. But there she was—unique, unappreciated, and content. I have



### *Episodes*

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never seen her since, but London is less prosaic in that such a girl is possible in West Kensington, going to Broadstairs every year.

## A MAN OF SENTIMENT

COLVERT was a novelist and a successful one. He was not simply a man who had written novels and might write more ; he was called a novelist as a policeman is called a policeman ; novel writing was his regular profession and he produced novels methodically—two a year (I think), or maybe three. “Mr. Colvert’s new novel will be called so-and-so” was a regularly recurring item in the newspapers’ “Literary Notes.” They seldom said more, not that Colvert was a reticent man, but because there was never more to say. When you had read one of Colvert’s novels, you had read, so far as scheme and the nature of their interest was concerned, them all. They are not bad reading. There is no subtlety and no thought in them, and the plots are turned out by machine, but

### *Episodes*

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there is a good deal of honest observation and study of the outsides of life, and, for my small part, I think Colvert a more meritorious writer than many more startling and more obviously modern people. One merit the average critic always observes in them, their wholesome, English sentiment, which usually comes in towards the end, when the excellent hero and heroine come together again. Given a sympathetic frame of mind in the reader, it is quite moving and adequate to the occasion.

But on the appearance of one of the novels a reviewer on a certain paper selected this very element for attack. He gave Colvert a column to himself and Colvert's sentiment a good three-quarters. He quoted, analysed, and came to the conclusion that it was artificial and stupidly so. He complimented Colvert on his general level of intelligence, and deplored that he should make such slips.

This review was read by Colvert with great attention. His wife, who also read it, said the reviewer was obviously a disappointed author,

### *A Man of Sentiment*

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inspired by malice, and that his dishonesty should be exposed. But Colvert knew better. He was no more subject to delusions of vanity than any other average man of business. Moreover, he was pleased that this particular reviewer had remarked (as eulogists of his sentiment had not always) that without parading his knowledge he (Colvert) was a better educated man and a writer of better English than the general run of novelists, which was Colvert's opinion also.

He took the paper to his study and considered the matter. He was a natural, direct man, with no airs and some sense of humour, and was far from taking himself for a genius. He knew that the books he turned out were neither masterpieces nor drivel, were good so far as they went. He knew that his general ability was a shade above the average and would have gained him much about the same success in other callings. That he was a practical man who had made it his first aim to secure his share of loaves and fishes. But at the same

### *Episodes*

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time it is hardly in human nature that one should be constantly informed that he has a vein of tender feeling, of love of the beautiful English home, and so forth, without coming to believe that it is more or less true. Colvert really thought that he had a fine appreciation of the longings of the human heart, or something of that sort. The review was therefore a little shock. He re-read it in his study. In particular he remarked the reviewer's cynical account of the genesis of his sentiment; it was not true, but how, as a matter of fact, did this tenderness for lovers' troubles come about in his brain? Colvert was not the recipient of young people's confidences: it must have been intuition. His mind ran back to the sentiment in his various novels, and vaguely and half-consciously admitted that he had repeated the same line of thought.

But in the first novel? Ah, me! The sentimental piece there was copied from an earlier novel which was never published; which was written when Colvert was not a successful novelist,

*A Man of Sentiment*

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but a young man who was going to recreate the world.

He came to no definite conclusions, but made a mental note that the paper was interesting. . . .

It was some weeks later that he read of the death in India of a woman he had once known very well, and locked his study door that morning after breakfast.

It was she who had given to a young man of ordinary tastes and ordinary ambitions a momentary enthusiasm. She was married then, a fragile, black-eyed little woman. Her husband was Colvert's friend at Cambridge and his friendship with the wife had no moment of direct passion in it. And yet it had been a romance. She was the most sensitive, the most highly developed creature (emotionally) that Colvert had met, and she had more grace and perfection of manner than men of Colvert's stamp can appreciate—for long. When he had become a successful novelist he would not have appreciated that perfection; a warm-

### *Episodes*

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hearted and generous boy (if an ordinary), fresh from the University, he had the sense to worship. She gave him some faint perception of what is gracious and lovely in life : he has lost it long since, but did well to worship a while. You might have called his feeling a kind of spiritual passion, if you would ; at least it was the only romance in Colvert's life, and when her husband exchanged into the Line and took her to India, Colvert felt the sun was darkened.

He went gloomily for a time, and then set himself to work and to succeed. He began his course of novels, and retired from the Civil Service, and in due time married where money was. He grew stout and bald and did the same thing every day, and took his month's holiday every year, and thought no more of the black-eyed, fragile little woman who had appointed him her knight. He was more like a knighted alderman than Sir Lancelot now.

As Colvert mused on these things, a thought occurred to him. It may have been that his brain had been unconsciously busied with the critic's analysis of his sentiment ; it may have

### *A Man of Sentiment*

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been also that humour for a moment illuminated him as he thought of his monotonous existence. Colvert told himself that he was feeling no genuine grief, that he had locked his study door and was musing before the fire in conventional recognition of the occasion. He compressed his lips, unlocked a drawer, and took out a slim packet of letters. He looked at them one by one—gay, gracious, thoughtful little letters they were, which had once stirred all that might be stirred in Colvert. Only a few came from India, and he remembered this with more feeling—a bitter feeling—than anything else. But otherwise they woke nothing in him now. He tried hard to remember how he had felt those years ago. His mind wandered to common things. He compressed his lips again and put the letters away. He was glad of an interruption.

If sentiment be dead in Colvert, there are many things in his commonplace middle age which make life worth living. He has broken his eggs, but his omelette is nutritive.

But he ought to respect that reviewer.



### *Episodes*

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## IN A MAN'S LIFE

*W.* THAT'S not as you used.

*M.* Not that?

*W.* No. Don't kiss me again. Tell me who she is.

*M.* Who?

*W.* Oh, I may as well hear all about it. I know the main fact, and may as well hear the particulars.

*M.* That must mean you don't—

*W.* Don't what?

*M.* Never mind. For God's sake change the subject.

*W.* You were going to say it meant I didn't care for you, only you thought the assumption that I had ever had a swaggering sort of thing and bad form. You see I have a little penetration. It's so funny after all that has happened

*In a Man's Life*

---

between us. But I rather like you for it. Now, tell me about her.

*M.* Suppose she existed, I hate talking to one woman about another.

*W.* In certain circumstances. For both their sakes and your own, I suppose. I know why you won't. You think all women are so vain that they can't bear the idea of being superseded. Of course it may be painful, sometimes, but to suppose that no woman can face the fact without a fit is so childish. You're a man of the world, but I believe you get your ideas of women out of books, after all. Of course I've seen for some time that she existed. I can bear it perfectly well, I assure you.

*M.* Too damned well——

*W.* What a brute you are! I had no conception you were so primitive. You intend to go to somebody else and are furious because I am not going to break my heart. I will comfort you: I bear it, my dear, because I know you will come back.

*M.* I shall never go—in a sense.



*Episodes*

---

*W.* Ah, there you admit it; that is all comfortable. In a sense? Always friends, you mean?

*M.* Yes, indeed.

*W.* Now that is sweet of you. I didn't mean—never mind. What is the attraction? I promise you I won't scoff.

*M.* If you insist—there is somebody who attracts me rather—not quite as you suppose.

*W.* Tell me about her. Surely I may take as much interest in you as that.

*M.* She's very feminine and frivolous and that sort of thing.

*W.* Young?

*M.* Yes.

*W.* Pretty, of course?

*M.* In her own way wonderfully pretty.

*W.* Ah, a reaction. A reaction from pince-nez and philosophy and a sort of distinguished ugliness.

*M.* For God's sake——

*W.* Oh, my good friend, because you're in a primitive mood I don't intend to grovel in a

mass of make-beliefs as well. You can't be always philosophical—that's one of the reasons I like you. Or rather you show practical philosophy. Tell me more. Are you going to marry her?

*M.* She's not——

*W.* Bring her to see me.

*M.* I tell you she's not——

*W.* I understand. Since when have you imagined I always consult Mrs. Grundy before seeing anybody? I wonder if you will marry her, though. If you grow affectionate and she isn't a fool you probably will. Educated?

*M.* Not in the ordinary sense.

*W.* I don't think I quite understand things. A commonplace amourette——Why are you leaving me "in a sense"?

*M.* Don't you understand I feel a brute when I come here?

*W.* Don't I understand you don't care about a quasi-love affair with me——

*M.* I had better go.

*W.* No, stay a little longer. I was reading

### *Episodes*

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Catullus to-day—shamefully unfeminine, wasn't it? That *da mi basia mille*—you know. Do you know I think there is something a little pathetic, for all our absurdities, in us over-educated and meditating women? We miss all that, that simple, foolish cooing. We needn't—there is no essential necessity; but somehow we do. Some little girl, very feminine and frivolous, comes in, and we, with our education and good sense and perception and the whole bag of tricks, as you say, have to scuttle away. . . . No. . . . Good-bye.

*M.* I don't want to go, but I know—

*W.* You know you will sooner or later. Good-bye. Perhaps you'll come back.

*M.* Good-bye. Oh, what a beast I am. Don't cry, for God's sake.

*W.* Oh, go—go! I am only tired. Go. Good—

*M.* [*To himself as he goes*]. What a beast I am.

## THE RECLAIMING OF A REPROBATE

HENRY was a man in the Guards, Grace was his sister, Eleanor was his wife, and Jack was his cousin. Henry, Eleanor, and Grace lived together, and Jack used frequently to dine with them. But a trifle more of description is unfortunately necessary.

Henry was not amusing, but full of common sense. He was fond of his profession and was a gentleman. Being thrown of necessity a good deal into the society of modern people he secretly detested the mode of the day, and found the effort to be frivolous, a bore.

Eleanor was the froth of a glass of champagne made into ethereal flesh. She was sensitive and had a keen sense of humour. She had an instinct and a passion for everything that was

### *Episodes*

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beautiful and gay. She was cynical and sentimental and profound and idiotic all at once, a perfect hostess and a perfect guest. Consequently she was popular with butterflies, but the women who tried to follow her fancies sometimes came to grief.

Jack and Henry had an affection for one another, begotten of habit, and possibly got relief from themselves in contrast. Henry was handsome, heavy, massive ; Jack was delightfully ugly and always looked on the point of death. He did nothing but hurry about between London and Paris, giving supper-parties and making jokes. He was morbidly artistic, and revelled in the humours of British morality.

Grace was a rather substantial beauty and not otherwise remarkable. Like her brother she would have been more at home socially in the middle Victorian period, but she was fond of seeing and being seen, and had acquired the superficial marks of Eleanor's friends.

The house in Berkeley Square belonged to Eleanor, who was an heiress. Jack had but a

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few hundreds a year and Grace had nothing; Eleanor, who adored her beauty, loved to lavish dresses and jewels on her. Of course Grace and Henry were allies, and Eleanor and Jack. But there had been no disunion. Each went his or her way unmolested, and brother and sister tacitly tolerated the wife as an irresponsible butterfly and the cousin as an amiable lunatic. Occasionally Grace would gratify her instincts by delivering a lecture on one of Eleanor's eccentricities. On these occasions Eleanor would pout a little, and be a little sarcastic, and suddenly kiss Grace and vow she was an angel, and there the incident would end.

But a little while before the episode I am about to relate happened, they had a rather serious conversation. It was on an afternoon in October, and they sat by the firelight, Grace in a large armchair, Eleanor on a stool at her feet.

"Is Henry coming home to-day?"

"No, poor dear boy, he can't leave Windsor. Jack and I will be alone, if you *must* go to your

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charming old stuffed dowager—I believe she was born one. Oh, Grace, it's going to be so delightful! Jack and I are going to play at being wicked wife and terrible young man. He has got a new place to dine at—quite disreputable, he says—and we're going to do all sorts of idiotic things." Eleanor took her cigarette from her mouth and waved a little ghost-like hand.

"Eleanor, dear, I suppose I'm very heavy and old-fashioned, but I wish you wouldn't. You're getting quite ill. And, Eleanor, there's another thing, I don't think Henry likes it."

"If Henry objected. . . . My darling child, I know you are a dear, but you mean so dreadfully well. What possible harm can there be?"

"May I tell you, Nelly?"

"That means I'm not to be allowed to take exception. But go on."

"Well, I'm worried a good deal about it——"

"You bear it nobly."

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"And it won't do any harm to have it out. Of course everybody understands Jack——"

"Poor Jack!"

"And Henry is very fond of him. But I know he thinks you go about with him—that isn't it quite, dear, I don't mean anything horrid, you know. Then Jack, it's an awful pity he lives as he does. With his money and title and all that——."

"I like his title," Eleanor murmured, "it's picturesque."

"He ought not to waste his time. Oh Eleanor, I'm going to vex you, but I must say it. How can you compare him, with all his follies and all that, to Henry? Of course I'm not an impartial judge, but I know Henry's the most scrupulous and upright man there is."

"Poor Henry, yes; he is, indeed. I don't compare them, Grace. Now, I don't know why, I am inclined to say something very plain to you. You will loathe me for it, but it is good sometimes to go to the root of things. I like Jack more than I can say. He is the dearest



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boy in the world, and always understands me. But I love Henry!"

"My dear! I beg——"

"Wait!" said Eleanor quickly. "Listen and you'll hate me. But you won't understand. Jack appeals to all there is good in me—all that is fine and artistic and intellectual. My love for Henry is merely sensual."

Grace gave a little exclamation.

"Yes, it is. I don't—never mind. It is simply because he is handsome and big and strong. Oh! I wish I were dead."

There was silence for a minute, and then Grace spoke severely: "Of course I'm not fool enough to think you mean a word you say. But surely it's not in good taste. Of course it's absurd to talk like that about Henry, and therefore doesn't matter. Still, I'm his sister."

"Oh, Grace, dear, I'm sorry. Yes, of course, I didn't mean it. You're a million times better than I, dear. But don't scold me. It's only misery to see things. Look how thin I am."

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Indeed, with her frail little figure, and her tiny little face, and her little un-English gestures, she was a contrast to the other, leaning stolidly back in her chair, a picture of plump self-satisfaction.

"Forgive me, Grace."

"I didn't mean to scold you, dear. You're so awfully good to me."

"My darling, as if all I had wasn't yours and Henry's! All"—she became wistful—"except Jack."

\* \* \* \*

A few weeks later Grace was alone when Jack came in. He was a stooping man, but moved gracefully. He looked quickly round the room and then a little keenly at Grace. She looked up languidly and gave him a passive hand with rather an imperial air. He shook it with no conventional affectation, and then sat down as one who could have stood no longer.

"Eleanor gone out?" he asked.

"Yes; she won't be back till dinner-time."

"I suppose I bore you, interrupting your

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reading. But I'm horribly tired ; let me stay and prose a bit. Shall I bore you ? ”

The girl's cheeks faintly dimpled. “ That,” she said, with immense condescension, “ remains to be seen. You may stay a little time.”

She looked at him with a cold impudence. Jack's lustreless eyes gleamed for a moment, and his sensual mouth twitched.

“ By Jove, how I love being bullied by you. Go on.”

“ Shall I ? ” she asked lazily. “ I don't know that you're worth it ; but I will, if you like. You're looking horribly ill, and you deserve to. Been dosing yourself with chloral ? ”

“ I must sleep.”

“ It will take away all your intellect.”

“ I can do without my cursed intellect.”

“ Well, it's all you've got, so far as I can see.”

“ Oh, no, it's not ; I've my reputation. That and my integrity to Heaven.”

“ Is that meant to be funny ? ”

“ Grace, how splendidly well you look.”

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"Robust? If you had nine hours sleep every night, and rode every day, you might too."

"Too late, cousin Grace. But talking of riding, I saw a charming little animal you'd like, the other day. Shall it pay for the lecture?"

Grace drooped her chin luxuriously.

"You may bring it round for me to see to-morrow at ten. Now go and see about it."

She held out her hand.

Jack, who had been intimate with a thousand and one women, and had one of the worst reputations in Europe, rose like an obedient schoolboy. But his head was clear, having been for long accustomed to observe his heart, as they call it.

"I'm growing senile," was the head's comment. He went and leaned over her chair.

"You're irresistible," he said.

"Cousin Jack," she said, looking indifferently.

"Good-bye."

He bent down, and she interposed a well-shaped arm, but did not say that which would,

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perhaps, have stopped him. He caught her wrist, which was soft and warm, and then kissed her mouth, a thing which might certainly have been prevented. But she made no response. She rose and told him he had gone too far. His exit was not worthy of his reputation.

When he was gone, Grace drew her chair to the fire, and sat down quite calmly. "The best thing for him and for Eleanor too," was the effect of her meditation.

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"You need not explain, Jack; Henry has told me all about it. It will be an admirable arrangement."

"You think I am bound to do it?"

"Yes; her ideas and everything considered, I think you should. Jack, Jack, don't be a humbug; why not admit you want to? As if you would do such a thing with altruistic intentions! Surely I deserve you should be frank with me."

"May I talk on the higher plane?"

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"Yes."

"Well, Nell, you've often known things about me, and not been insulted. You know my nature. You remember last year in Paris? You are my friend: worth all the rest of the world put together to me. Other women—you understand. Accident makes the consequences of this very different, but really it is just the same."

"My husband's sister, Jack?"

"Bah! I know myself, Nell. She will always be treated as though she were the only woman in the world, but the attraction is simply sensual."

"Oh, Jack, I was the humbug then; of course I knew it. I don't suppose she understands what she did, but I can see. Our British morality, Jack! Isn't it curious? You know it's the same, conversely, with Henry and me. Isn't it strange? People look upon you and me as at best two worthless butterflies, and at worst a sort of Roman Empire people. They think our intimacy at best eccentric

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at worst criminal. Henry and Grace are two rigid, virtuous, conventional people. And I am married to Henry, and you are going to marry Grace—just because of what is animal in us. And we are friends in everything that is more than that."

"Shall I go back? It will mean breaking with Henry. I quite see his point of view."

"It will mean not seeing me, Jack. No, go on with it. I dare say you'll alter, but you'll last my time. We can be friends."

"She won't try to prevent it?"

"I think not; she has the position of advantage, you see, and I think she'll keep it. A few years ago it would have been different: you'd have freed yourself. As it is, she will have no fear of losing you. We shall be allowed to talk nonsense sometimes."

"I'm a horrid cad, Nell, and I wish I were dead."

"It's an odd world, Jack."

"It's the damndest world I ever saw, Nell."

## FOR WANT OF A BETTER

YOU see that man coming in at the door? He is a very important person. Observe with what majesty he takes off his great-coat, with what deliberate pomp he seats himself. See the air of prime importance with which he reads the menu. I can tell you something about him.

There was a time when he was a brilliant young journalist. He had learned to read and write, and as a very young man spent his evenings, though tired with his office work, in mastering the productions of each succeeding cockney humourist, and in scribbling. Then he began to send in his effusions to the editors of popular prints, and on a day one of them was accepted. Then he had a stroke of luck, which perhaps he deserved for a certain civilised power of waiting and self-control which he



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had undoubtedly shown. His signature to an article was printed by mistake, and since the article attracted attention his name was allowed to appear at the foot of others. (I have heard him speak very sarcastically of anonymous journalists.) He had an instinct for a smart vulgarity of phrase which went straight to the great heart of the people, and was soon popular. He became prosperous and continued to be so for many years. But of late, though he is still well-to-do, and elderly people of a certain type still think him funny, he has lost a great part of his popularity, and all the distinction he had among his fellows. They used to approach him with reverence, and he used to smile complacently as they told him how their wives had screamed over his latest effort. The papers used to tell him that he had surpassed himself, and say that any work from the prolific pen of the ever-something Mr. X. was sure of a hearty reception. But now the critics have found other gods, and are wont to call him dull and to damn him with faint praise, and even to use

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his name as a synonym for vulgarity. He has taken to abusing the other gods, very naturally ; but the result is that most of his acquaintances, who in the beginning of his decline said he was a good fellow personally, fight shy of his society. There are left, it is true, a few rowers in the same boat, and when these get together their abuse of the other gods is very fierce and their confidence in the good sense of "the public" very loud. But they are rowing against the tide and their arms are becoming stiff. Myself, I see no pathos in it.

See ! the young man who has just passed with a little nod to the ex-great man, was once proud to call him friend. Now he is afraid to talk to him, lest he peril his reputation, and goes quickly by. Perhaps there is something sad in it. The fellow was never amiable, except it may be before his success. He was loud-voiced and underbred, but so are many of those who have deserted him. He had brought himself to rely on "the public" as on a long-suffering wife, and the public has eloped. And

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now he can only bully the air and foretell a reaction which never comes. It is not by accident that he is going to dine alone. Indeed, he would be a dull companion. He had no real friends, and it is worth nobody's while now to tolerate him.

Ah, he rises! He has a guest. Do you know her? This species of the genus has few individual varieties. It attracts one vaguely and occasionally. The little pinched, wicked face, the smiling mouth, and hard unchanging eyes—unchanging for such a one as he is—they have a curious sort of artificial femininity which is sometimes pleasant. But the man? He used to be a most respectable man. It is desire—desire to plume himself and abuse others unchecked. She knows nothing about it, but will affect an admirable sympathy. He is become very vain, and vanity must have an outlet. Is not popular education a mistake? And, poor little woman, she will be so terribly bored.

## THE EMANCIPATION OF A CURATE

MISS ROSANNA MONTANE took herself very seriously. She believed herself an inspired practitioner of the art of acting, the greatest of all arts, and, as such, entitled to condemn all people who earned their bread in the daytime all merely domestic and ordinary people whatsoever. She believed that any man or woman was honoured by her notice. She had no doubt but that she embodied all the genius of all the ages.

The reality was that being a shrewd woman of agreeable presence, she had attained a second-rate success with which the art of acting had nothing to do, nothing in the world. Her idea of acting was to smile sweetly, to speak softly, to look ladylike—as

the average pittance understands the word—and when she sat down, to whisk her dress so that the folds of it were graceful. She was never offered a part in which to look ladylike and the rest of it would have been inappropriate, since the limitations of her powers were understood, and so her belief in the universality of her genius would have been undisturbed, even if it dawned upon her, as it had not, that to whisk one's skirt is not the end of playing. She had succeeded chiefly because she was not artistic, not susceptible of rebuff, not excited by desire of achievement, not cognisant of other signs of merit than paragraphs in the newspapers and amplitude of salary. As a girl her good looks had taken her from behind a counter, and placed her some way up her peculiar ladder; pertinacity and ability to use her opportunities had done the rest. Now, at thirty-five, she was a recognised exponent of her line, and always third or fourth on the list of salaries. She was handsome still, very buxom and healthy. She always walked four miles a day, went to bed at

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half-past twelve, slept eight hours and a half, and began the day with a hearty breakfast. She was very severe on people who had no souls.

Miss Rosanna Montane was a widow, being known in private as Mrs. Spencer-Blugge. Blugge was a young blood on the Stock Exchange when he married her. He died before he had made much of a pile, but left her eight hundred a year, which he had inherited, and reminiscences of romance, of which he, good man, had been all unconscious. She lived, in her comfortable South Kensington house, with a companion, who kept up a never-dying fire of adulation, which may or may not have been sincere. It began with the hearty breakfast and awaited her return to a judicious supper. Miss Rosanna Montane never wearied of it, and, to do her justice, paid for it quite as much as it was worth. It could not have been amusing to the companion to read aloud long notices of plays which evoked no visible emotions in her hearer, except beautiful humi-

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lity under praise of herself, and divine toleration of the praises of other people ; but she had little else to do beyond delivering eulogies, which habit had made a sort of reflex action. The great Rosanna was kind to all her inferiors, who were such inhabitants of this planet as came in her way. It would be difficult to imagine a more thoroughly bourgeois temperament and life than that of Miss Rosanna Montane.

Nevertheless, a curate of the church she honoured every Sunday, fell in love with her because she was an artist. The remark is true in two manners. The original attraction to the curate was that he, a raw youth from the provinces, *viâ* Cambridge, found himself in familiar converse with an expert in, and as it were a priestess of, a life which was associated in his imagination with brilliant intercourse and mysterious delights. He felt that sense of joyous importance which the very young and raw derive from private knowledge of public people, and early teaching had invested the stage with a mysterious wickedness in his mind

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which, of course, was turned to admiration. He accepted Rosanna at her own valuation from the outset.

But in another and truer manner he loved her because she was an artist. She was an artist in femininity. Now, our curate was no curate of farce. He was a vigorous, athletic young fellow, and essentially virile. A delicate suggestion of sex, therefore, a suggestion (by no means mincing) of weakness where he was strong, and in general of attractive opposition, was to him irresistible. Rosanna was a true artist in that she made every weapon in her female armoury go home. She achieved what is surely one of the greatest of a woman's triumphs ; she kept him in exactly that stage of devotion which was convenient to her. How far she was a conscious artist, how it is that women of generally mediocre intelligence and tact can achieve these things, I do not know. You must admit it is a tolerably complex development of an instinct, and give Rosanna some credit for wisdom.



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Our curate was no curate of farce. He was warm-heated. But he looked up to her as a bright star, and his training and the bent of his impulses and ambitions retarded direct sexual feeling ; consequently he accepted the element of motherly protection which she rather subtly expressed, and was content to be very humble and essentially distant. Our curate was clear-headed. But the accidents of education, again, had left his intellectual outlook narrow, his logical faculty undeveloped ; when therefore Rosanna expounded to him the watery theism she had gathered confusedly from a popular book, he neither denounced it as a stupider young man might have done, nor argued about it, demonstrating it wrong or old-fashioned, as a better taught one : he sat wondering at Rosanna's feet. Thus, in addition to her qualities of mysterious charm and genius, she possessed in his eyes a stupendous superiority of intellect. He believed he was ready to be burned alive for her sake, would actually have cheerfully given her everything he possessed,

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and was content with the pressure of her hand. As for marriage, young men of twenty-five and slender means do not, when they are gentlemen, bring themselves easily to contemplate living on the exertions of their wives.

When a boyish young man of twenty-five is in love with a woman ten years his senior and of somewhat matronly figure, the situation is apt to be a little ridiculous. But Rosanna took care that the ridicule, if any, should fall on the curate. She spoke of him with casual indifference as a nice, but rather foolish boy, and the nature of his folly, indicated by a little smile, brought her a certain amount of kudos. She found him useful. It rather impressed very theatrical people who came to lunch to find a gentlemanly young parson treating their hostess with obviously sincere reverence. He was useful as a respectable tame cat, and in like manner as a well-trained dog, to accompany her occasionally in her walks abroad. He fetched and carried assiduously, and got up a series of entertainments for some charity or other, of

which he had all the work and Rosanna the glory, which helped substantially her social position in South Kensington.

Their relations had continued in this wise for a year or so, the curate professing at intervals his regret that social conventions did not permit him to consecrate his possessions to the genius he adored, when Rosanna benignantly devised a perfectly respectable manner of accomplishing his desire. She resolved to take a theatre for the London season. Her idea was to get a play from a popular author, to engage two or three of the most popular actors available, and to queen it among them as the principal woman. The result was certain to be serviceable to herself in point of notices, and might easily lead to a succession of leading parts. On the other hand, Rosanna knew that in this way money is easily lost—neither popular authors nor popular actors are cheap—and she had no intention of losing any. For years she had been steadily saving, and intended to retire on not less than two thousand a year. She was not, you see,

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bitten by the mania of the boards ; they were a means to affluence with her. Not that she believed she thought so, by the way ; she was convinced, as has been said, that she was an inspired priestess of art. But these lofty convictions may often co-exist with perfectly practical purposes, and Rosanna was to retire before she was old into comfortable idleness.

Money might be lost, and it was not to be hers. But if she were to induce an ordinary financier to run the risk he would take the lion's share of the possible profits. Clearly, a kind friend was needed, and Rosanna thought of the curate. He had, she knew, a little income of his own, the capital of which was some few thousand pounds. It was quite certain that the popular author's and the popular actors' names, to say nothing of her own (which, she recognised without the definite thought, was not quite magical) would bring people enough to the play to let it run on for a few months with only a comparatively small loss ; the curate's thousands would be sufficient. Should she ask, or rather

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graciously permit him to put them at her disposal? The process of thought by which Rosanna passed from deciding it unwise to risk her own money to deciding that the curate's risk would be merely formal, and that, being a poor man, the almost certain gain would be a godsend to him—this process of thought might be described. But the description would be a deal longer than the process. The curate of course was full of gratitude for being permitted to render this little service to her genius and art. He agreed (legally) to stand the loss, if any, to a certain extent (namely, the amount of his capital), and to receive, on the other hand, a portion of the profits. He protested against this latter clause, but Rosanna sweetly insisted; in truth, the fraction was ridiculously insignificant.

This matter settled, the rest proceeded admirably. A theatre with a reputation for success was taken for the beginning of May, and by the middle of March the popular author had written a play which he pronounced to be his best. It

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contained one excellent female part, for which sweetness and ladylikeness were the chief requisites, and two excellent male parts, to fill which two of the most popular actors in London were luckily engaged, both professing themselves delighted. There was one subdued foil to Rossana's part, and the other female parts were nothing at all.

In good time, when you are bored with respectability and innocence, there falls to be presented to you a person who was neither innocent nor respectable. Some years before the curate formed his delightful friendship with Rosanna Montane, a very rich devotee of the stage discovered in a girl who was playing a small part in an unimportant theatre something he took for genius. He brought her out in a star part and the town came to see her. The discoverer was justified ; for some few weeks London was electrified—as much as it knows how to be—by a display of concentrated passion. Dora Davenant, as she called herself, was an artist all over, an artist who came of a

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handsome, gentle stock, and had given herself wholly to art. She had her reward for a few weeks, and then gave herself wholly to real life. She ran away with a ne'er-do-well, a delightful, witty wastrel, whom the boredom of a debt-paying marriage had driven to desperation. His wife did not divorce him, and so he lived in unwedded bliss with Dora at various gay places abroad. He was a good-hearted and delicately-mannered man, and the mutual fascination lasted until he died.

Then Dora had to face the world with a child and without a penny. She had her genius, but genius cannot play a highwayman's part in our world, and sorrow and anxiety broke down her health, and she had a fever, and at the time Rosanna Montane was engaging her company, Dora Davenant came out of the hospital and took her child to an attic in Soho. There she read of Rosanna's enterprise in a theatrical paper and wrote a humble letter to her. Rosanna remembered her perfectly well; she had, in fact, taken a subordinate part to Dora's

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in that few weeks' forgotten triumph. She determined to give her the part of the foil, taking care it should be nothing more. It pleased her vanity to reverse their old positions; she liked the idea of patronage, and it seemed to her that the circumstances narrated in the letter would make Dora's services cheap. Rosanna said to herself that it was a duty of one woman to help another, however erring.

So one afternoon Dora, the sinner, was in the drawing-room in South Kensington. It was a sumptuous room, and its mistress wished the outcast to receive a chastening impression from it; it would be easy to send her away if any respectable person called. But Dora, waiting there, was too weary with the walk from Soho to observe its magnificence. Her big black eyes, which had been fires, looked blankly from her thin, white face. The black hair on the broad forehead was mingled with grey, and she was twenty-six years old. Her dress was not neat and black, as repentance should be; it had



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been bright and was faded. She wore no gloves on hands which showed a mass of veins. That was genius and unwisdom. She watched the door anxiously, until prudence and mediocrity in a dream of a tea-gown came sailing in. Rosanna held out her hand with the air of conferring a privilege, sweetly smiling. Then looking the other in the face she said she was sorry to have brought her all that way, as she was afraid she could not engage her after all. Dora, impulsive, excitable, and broken-hearted, poured out a story of sorrow and appeal which would have stirred an audience of critics, to which Rosanna listened, looking very healthy and respectable, and twiddling the rings on her sleek fingers. Then she did what she had intended to do, and offered to engage Dora at a quarter of the salary she expected. She was so sweet about it that the other did not realise the smallness of the offer until she had accepted it with gratitude. "It is not much," she said, "but for my boy's sake——"

"Ah, yes," interrupted virtue, "we pay for our

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sins. But the salary is quite as much as you have a right to expect."

There was only a suggestion of scorn in the black eyes.

"You have never——," she began, but broke off. "I don't think you mean to be cruel."

"Cruel!" said Rosanna sharply, "I'm doing it simply out of compassion, and I think you might be a little grateful."

There was a knock at the street-door.

"Now I'm afraid you must go. I'll let you know the date of the first rehearsal, and I'll send you a cheque to-night. Good-bye," she said sweetly, as the door opened; "I'm so glad to have been able to help you."

The curate, as he held the door for Dora to go out, noticed her beauty and her sickness, and saw she had been crying.

"Who is that?" he asked Rosanna.

"A woman who has sinned and been punished. I'm giving her a part. It's foolish of me, I suppose, but I pity her so, though she was much to blame. She can't act much.

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You don't blame me, do you? You know I can never be a prude."

"How wonderfully good you are!" said the curate, as he reverently pressed her soft hand. He said it sincerely, but a little absently withal.

When you are told that chance ordained he should see much of Dora Davenant, you sagaciously guess a conclusion. But the development was not uninteresting. Dora left Soho and came to live in two rooms in a back street in South Kensington; and the curate being sent with a message to her (the wisest of us make mistakes) by Rosanna, found her ill, and called to see how she was, and called again and again. His was a healthy nature which is never for long the victim of morbid feeling. His sterile devotion to Rosanna, as time went on and experience brought knowledge to him, began to wane. Glamour was wearing off, and custom was not old enough to beget a state of mesmerism, even had he been a subject for it. In fine, he

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was being emancipated from ideal devotion, and was attached to Dora Davenant with a healthy, human love.

Our curate was not a curate of farce, nor was he any ideal of a curate. He had "gone into the Church" because it came in his way; he was neither ascetic nor devoted to a spiritual end. He was a man of strong natural passion, which had never been repressed, but which the accidents of life had never fully evoked. Now they evoked it, and before it everything else went down: the requirements of his calling and his prejudice against Dora's past life, all were nothing. Strong passion, to boot, brought the man's natural powers, all of them, into play. If Rosanna Montane had had leisure in those days to repeat her lectures on theism, she would have been surprised at their reception. The curate was on the point of being a curate no more. In fine, his attitude to life was become a thousand times more Bohemian than that of Rosanna Montane.

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Meanwhile the play ran its course through a season. It was successful in a way, was talked about, and served Rosanna's purpose. Distinctly, it had done her a world of good in her profession. All the critics praised her, and a few gave a line to Dora Davenant's insignificant part, and spiritless rendering of it, regretting that her old form was gone. But the popular author had made a mistake. He had imbibed as he thought something that somebody called the new spirit; that may have been the case, but he did not express it to interest people. They came from curiosity, talked about it, and did not come again, nor urge their friends very strongly to do so. Expenses were heavy. Seeing that a fortune could not be made out of the play, Rosanna wisely determined to make it as useful as possible without regard to money, within the limits of the curate's security. She gave seats away lavishly. She displayed her comely form in a succession of wonderful dresses, which (by the curate's consent) were treated as part

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of the general outlay, and brought her innumerable paragraphs in articles on fashion. The weekly deficit was still not very great; the curate's thousands held out till the end of July.

Then she sent for him and told him how sorry she was his money was lost.

"My poor boy," she said in her softest manner, "I never dreamed you would lose anything. If I could only afford it I would make it up to you—if you would let me, that is."

"I would not," said the curate.

"That is like you," said she with an admiring glance, and held out her hand. He took it, but did not press it with his old reverence.

"I've been a fool," he said, and Rosanna looked up sharply. "I've thrown my money away foolishly, but I have no wish to shirk the consequences. I congratulate you on your success, and now," he said, with rather an enigmatical smile, "congratulate me on something. Miss Davenant has consented to marry me."

Rosanna had acquired a manner which passes

## *Episodes*

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with many people for good breeding. When, however, good breeding has not been the habit of a life, it is apt to break down in emergencies.

"Marry that—marry *her*! Do you know——"

"I know all her history."

Rosanna's manner changed.

"You might have told me before," she said in a low voice. "You know I should be glad of anything that was for your happiness. I suppose," she continued softly, "I shall not see you so much now. I'm very, very sorry. But it will not be yet?"

"I'm afraid I misstated the tense. We are married." Rosanna's manner changed again.

"Do you expect me to receive her as a friend? May I ask if you intend to keep your curacy?"

"Well, no. I couldn't support a wife on it, and my private means"—Rosanna blushed ever so slightly and clenched her hand—"but I'm going out of the Church." He took his leave in disgrace, and Rosanna talked the matter over with her companion, who condoled with her on

*The Emancipation of a Curate*

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having been so kind to so worthless a young man.

"I'm afraid they'll be punished enough," said Rosanna; "so far as I can see they'll starve. Poor things!" she added compassionately, but the tone was perfectly comfortable.

They have not starved yet, but they have not always had enough to eat. Dora cannot get an engagement, and the ex-curate's journalistic hackery is not so far remunerative. But he is a clever fellow, and with average luck is like to succeed in time. He may even one day be distinguished enough to renew his acquaintance with Rosanna. He may possibly write a book which she will be quite unable to understand.

She meantime is handsome and buxom as ever, enjoys life thoroughly, and makes an excellent income from her profession. She is courted a good deal, for her acting, her Sunday dinners, and her beautiful life, and takes herself even more seriously than before. She cannot forgive the curate his emancipation, and if they



### *Episodes*

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ever meet, her gentle melancholy will be very pretty to see. But she has not to forgive him any wrong done by her, for her companion has easily persuaded her she was his kindest friend.

## THE END OF ALL THINGS

"MADAME died early this morning. Lucile."  
That was to say, Jean, whom I cared for more than for the rest of the world, was dead. It was Tuesday, no, Wednesday, that I saw her last. I was to dine with her that day. Jean was dead. We must look straight at facts and consider how they affect us. Let me think. All that was over; Jean was dead; there was nothing to interest me. . . I remembered how a few mornings before I had read of some thousands of Chinese being destroyed by a flood, and had attempted, as I ate my breakfast, to realise what that fact meant, and had failed to find in myself an atom of genuine sympathy. As I sat with this telegram in front of me I was (I believe) for a while in the same case. A woman was dead; the fact confronted me, and I repeated it to

### *Episodes*

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myself mechanically. How it affected me I could not tell. Gradually her qualities, as I knew them, passed before my mind, as though I had called on my memory to answer a question asked of me. She was nominally English, and one took her at sight for a Frenchwoman. She was a widow and lived alone in a toy house, and we had argued about marriage and agreed it was too great a risk. We saw each other, by arrangement, three days a week ; on the first of them she was absurdly domestic, on the second cynical and captious, on the third wild and a paradox. Her eyes were always contradicting her speech, and I never quite understood her smile. When I thought of her smile, I finished dressing quickly and went out and hailed a cab ; I remember waving to a man I knew in the street.

I pushed past the servant who opened the door and was going upstairs, when Lucile ran quickly down and stopped me. "Ah, no, Monsieur," she said, breathlessly, "you must not go in. Why distress oneself without cause ?

*The End of all Things*

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One cannot change things ; it is better to go away." A sense of oddity struck through my stupor, and I looked down at Lucile. She was a pretty, demure little Frenchwoman, who Jean used to say was one of her two tyrants. As she raised her eyes for a moment she looked anxious, and not as though she had been crying. "Tell me," I said. "The doctor said it was the heart ; he is coming back soon. It was late last night she was ill. She died peacefully ; Monsieur, and her last words were of you. Poor Madame, I never thought she was not strong—that treacherous heart !" She pressed a hand against her breast, and I noticed a big emerald, which I remembered. She had followed my eyes and cried, "Ah, how I forget everything. I mean, Madame gave me the ring." "Damn the ring !" I said ; "let me pass, Lucile." "Ah, no, no," she cried, and as I pushed her aside she clung to my arm ; "it is a friend—he came by accident this morning and would go up. I will tell him to go ; come to the drawing-room. You must not compromise Madame."

### *Episodes*

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But something in her voice made me thrust her aside and go straight into the bedroom. A man rose from the side of the bed, and I stood facing one I had known all my life.

Ideas seemed to rise up in my brain and hold each other at a deadlock. I remember nothing but that I turned on my heel and left the room. I heard him following me. Upstairs was a dead woman on a bed with what had seemed a smile upon her lips.

## FROM A COMPARATIVE HISTORY

"LOOK here, Squashy, a word with you, my young friend. You seem to think you can do what you jolly well please, and that's just what you jolly well can't do. Do you see? I don't mind you being a brewer, but I can't stand a fellow who swaggers. You must take it off, Squashy. Don't let me have to say it again!"

They were two boys at a preparatory school, and were both thirteen, in their last term. Tommy Lawden was tall for his age, thin, fair-haired, blue-eyed, clear-featured. He carried himself easily and uprightly, was a fair cricketer, and low down in the school. He belonged to a type that is essentially aristocratic, and was as a matter of fact of an old family. His father, a retired colonel, had little beyond his half-pay.

## *Episodes*

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The boy called Squashy was not of an aristocratic type. He was short and podgy, a fat boy who looked about him with cautious eyes. He was fairly sharp-witted, and in the top-form ; he hated games, but played them on occasion because he had social ambitions. His father was a rich brewer, whose hopes were centred in Squashy, and who gave him unlimited pocket-money.

Squashy looked at Tommy Lawden and looked away. They were alone in a class-room, and he could afford to accept the rebuke. So he affected to treat it as a joke, laughed uneasily, and walked out of the room. A very small boy ran into him ; Squashy kicked the very small boy, and went on his way with renewed self-respect.

That afternoon, while Tommy Lawden did extra drill, Squashy, being in the top-form, walked into the near little town and returned laden with good things. Tommy Lawden did not share in their distribution.

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*From a Comparative History*

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They went to the same public school. Tommy Lawden was popular with those who knew him, but never rising high at work nor gaining much distinction at games, he was not an eminent figure. At seventeen he was much as at thirteen, absolutely a gentleman and a sportsman in grain, a good-natured, affectionate lad of mediocre powers. Squashy's social star rose rapidly. Any important big boy with whom he could scrape an intimacy was asked to Squashy's house in the holidays, where he was regaled, as Squashy's father put it, on "the best that could be procured." Squashy played at games for the look of the thing, conciliated the masters, and became a monitor. His fags detested him, and some of his comrades kept up a state of neutrality towards him. But on most his raiment and his wealth made the impression he desired. He was laboriously genial to everybody, and even carefully polite to his fags, who hated him all the same. I suppose Squashy never did a deed in his life that was merely kind; he calculated effects as naturally



### *Episodes*

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as he ate his dinner. This was vaguely felt, and was the qualification of his success. There was no need for Squashy to calculate; his general abilities would have secured him a fair place among his fellows, and had he been simple, he would not probably have been unpopular. But Squashy was born "on the make," and was determined his wealth should "procure the best." So he planned and plotted, and crept at last into an equivocally foremost place. Towards the end of his school-time he introduced into his intimate conversations judicious references to the wickedness of his London life, and became a sort of hero to a certain set.

One afternoon Squashy, sitting in his study, uplifted his voice and shouted "fag!" No answering fag appeared, and he was fain to go in person to the lower room of his house. There, sitting before the fire and reading a paper, was Tommy Lawden. He looked round and turned back to his paper.

"I called 'fag,'" said Squashy.

"I know ; I heard you," replied Tommy Lawden.

"Why didn't you come?" asked Squashy.

Tommy Lawden looked at him and returned to his paper. He was in a form exempted by custom from fagging, but supposed to "answer fag" when no boy of a lower form was forthcoming. Once again were he and Squashy alone together in a critical situation, but this time Squashy felt his ground more secure. He felt that his position, if not good enough for the assertion of his strict rights, would support him in a course of magnanimity.

"Look here, Lawden," he said ; "if you'd come, I shouldn't have fagged you. But you ought to have come, and I don't think you should take advantage of our having been at Templeton's together to cheek me."

He spoke with a sorrowful dignity that was well contrived. Tommy Lawden rose and stood with his back to the fire.

"I don't see how I *can* cheek you," he said, "but I'm sorry I was rude."

## *Episodes*

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Squashy beamed with geniality at once.

"All right, old man ; that's all right, you know. I don't see why we should quarrel because I happen to be a monitor ; do you ? Let's shake hands."

Tommy Lawden looked down at the rather coarse hand with its three inches of spotless shirt-cuff. He held out his own, which was long and slender and hard, and did not like the soft, clammy touch which met it.

"I hope you're getting on all right," said Squashy ; "if there's anything I can do for you, you know, let me know."

"Oh, thanks," said Tommy Lawden, as Squashy, smiling agreeably, left the room.

Squashy felt that by all the rules of conduct that he knew, his spirit in the interview had been the more gentlemanly of the two, and yet he felt a vague misgiving. Tommy Lawden wondered why he could not respond to the other's geniality. He knew, or thought he knew, that he had outgrown the sort of snobbishness which a house, whose one felt possession was

birth, had fostered. As things were now, he was able to reflect, there were far more people to despise him for his poverty than to despise Squashy for that he was a brewer. He did not think he was envious of Squashy's position ; no doubt he was a clever chap. But being unaccustomed to self-analysis, Tommy Lawden's conclusions were wholly negative.

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At Oxford there could be no question at all of the relative importance of the two. Tommy Lawden played cricket for his college, but not for the university. He was never more than sufficiently dressed. He could not afford to belong to expensive clubs, to give dinners, or to play cards, save for the lowest points. He loved long, commonplace talks with simple folk like himself. He had but a few intimates. He was respected, and the choice spirits of his college nodded affably to him, but he was never one of their set.

But of Squashy his father remarked with pride, "My son is in the very best set in the

### *Episodes*

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place," and there were many people to agree with him. Squashy managed to be elected to a very fashionable club. There was no undue worship of money in the matter ; it was natural that young men who were for the first time feeling the pleasures of lavishness should welcome one who, being passably well-mannered, was lavish too. Squashy's furniture and horses and special trains to London were a natural and quite harmless theme of admiration. And yet somehow it happened that as the "men" of his year settled into intimacies, Squashy was never treated with more than a superficial familiarity. He was at all the dinners and card parties that were of any fashion ; but it was not to him that his companions brought their troubles—other than the troubles of creditors and dons. The vague effects of his incurable calculations followed him to Oxford. But nobody compared him with Tommy Lawden.

"Do you know that man Lawden"? asked one of him, and Squashy, with conscious kind-

*From a Comparative History*

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ness, replied, "Oh, yes. There's not much in him, you know, but he's a very gentlemanly man."

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Squashy left Oxford and became a young man about town. He dined and went to the play or a music-hall, and supped afterwards at the place of the hour, and went to clubs where you did not go till two in the morning. He went racing, and to all places where the "best men" of his set at Oxford went. He managed to get into a good club, and was asked to balls in the season. He was seen at Homburg and at Monte Carlo. And through it all he kept himself well in hand, was careful of his health, never wasted money when there was none to see, and calculated consistently on social rises.

Tommy Lawden became a clerk in a bank, and lived, passing dully, on two hundred pounds a year. It was a concern to him to find the subscription to a football club and to be provided with a decent shirt on the few occasions when he dined out. He had about three cronies

### *Episodes*

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in London with whom he smoked interminable pipes at night.

He sat one evening at a restaurant eating roast beef and potatoes. It was a restaurant in Piccadilly where men may eat, cheaply or not, as they please. Tommy Lawden was, as always, dressed with careless conformity to the mode of the time, and had an air of simple distinction which was perceived by the most unlikely people. As (you may think) was a woman at the next table, who looked hard at him and faintly smiled. She was, if you care to know, a singer at a music-hall, and was eating a simple dinner before she went to her humble performance. She was neither flaunting nor evil-looking in the slightest degree. She was simply a cockney girl, pretty, fresh-looking, and but very slightly rouged, dressed quietly, save perhaps for her big black feathers. She was accustomed from childhood to easy intercourse, and had no dark designs whatever when she smiled at Tommy Lawden. And he, who was tired and bored and dull, smiled back at her and presently went to drink

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*From a Comparative History*

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his coffee at her table. She talked to him with no assertion of fastness, but with a natural sense of fun and good companionship, and if she found out his pecuniary status, it was asked with inoffensive frankness. His manner and speech were without any sort of affectation, so that she accepted him unregretfully as her superior. They became quite intimate, and he asked her to sup with him when her performance was over. As she considered, she looked towards the door and her manner changed, and she spoke hurriedly. "No, dear friend, I can't. I wish I could : I like you ; you're my sort. It's the dubs, my dear ; I can't afford to miss them. I didn't know he'd come for me here, but *that's* my little lot !" She shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, and made a little grimace of facile pathos.

And Tommy Lawden, looking towards the door, saw entering a sleek young man, haughty, resplendent.

\* \* \* \*

Some little time later there was an announce



### *Episodes*

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ment in the papers of the engagement of the man I have called Squashy, now aged twenty-six, to a woman of such qualifications as Squashies do most desire in their wives.

If Tommy Lawden has reasonable luck he will, when about forty-five years old, be rich enough to keep a wife of his own class in reasonable comfort.

And the world continues to move upon its axis.

## AN EPISODE IN A COMMONPLACE LIFE

WHEN her father died, Jane Travers was twenty-six years old. Having been almost alone in the world for six years, in attendance on an affectionate and querulous invalid, she now found herself quite alone. She was tall, thin, awkward in movement ; her features were large, but gave one no idea of determination ; she had patient eyes and a tremulous mouth. She had read many books and had pondered over them much ; she was neither ready nor impressive in conversation. Necessity and habit had combined with early training—or an inherited impulse, was it?—to foster in her a desire and faculty of self-sacrifice. Providence ordained that they should be exercised and developed.

The widow of her father's elder brother asked

### *Episodes*

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her to live for a while with herself and her daughter until she had determined her future plans. Jane had hardly ever seen Mrs. Travers and her cousin Geraldine. They lived in a gayer part of the town, saw a good deal of the world, and had a contempt, which was not wholly snobbery, for the scientific recluse and his daughter. Mrs. Travers was a handsome matron, a dark woman of forty-three or so, with clear, even features, and a clear, pale complexion; stout, in a robust, healthy way; a woman of a limited and well-ordered intelligence and an absolutely perfect digestion.

Geraldine was twenty-two at this time, an active, healthy girl, who had a reputation for wit and the instinct of society; she was like her mother in face, but fairer; in body graceful and supple and of a pleasant plumpness. Mother and daughter were consciously careful of their health, and consistent practitioners of an unconscious theory of life; to laugh constantly, to eat and drink pleasantly, and to be clothed in the mode, to be amused and admired were their

*An Episode in a Commonplace Life*

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desires, and since they gratified them they were optimists.

They received Jane with the amount of kindness and interest they would have bestowed on any guest, and Jane was extravagantly grateful. Her instinct for affection and service at once found an outlet ; at once she began to admire, to idealise, and to worship. She was caught by one of those inexplicable fascinations to which poor mortals are liable. Herself worth many times her kinswomen intellectually and morally—and even in point of looks there were men who would have chosen her odd kindliness of face before her cousin's sleek and commonplace regularity—she came rapidly to look upon them as angels to whom it was a privilege to be a slave. They accepted this view complacently and humoured it all day long.

At the end of three weeks an arrangement was made by which she was to live permanently with her aunt. Her father's five hundred a year was at her own disposal ; part of it she gave directly to her aunt, the rest was mostly spent in presents

or nominally lent to her extravagant cousin. Mrs. Travers was well-off, but appreciated these additional hundreds. In time the successfully commonplace triumphed over the weekly abnormal. Neither Mrs. Travers nor Geraldine was conscious of regarding Jane as a being existing for their comfort ; they accepted her money and her services naturally and remorselessly. They were two eupeptic, strong-willed, and absolutely selfish people ; she was sensitive, weak, and with a mania for self-sacrifice. It was quite without thought or intention on their part that she drifted into occupying her days as an unpaid secretary, needlewoman, and companion, assisting in the preparation for and consequences of amusements in which she had little part, it being understood that she was delicate, and averse from society. But since this was the state of their relations, they accepted it as good.

It was therefore disagreeable to them when this state came into jeopardy. There was about town in those days a middle-aged man of letters

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*An Episode in a Commonplace Life*

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called Percival, who, undistinguished though he was—little more than a superior hack, in fact—was a tolerably intimate acquaintance of Mrs. Travers. He had talked a few times with Jane, found that they had much in common, and by way of defying the law of the attraction of opposites conceived a wish to marry her. It was not passion, not even desire ; he was tired of being alone, and wanted somebody to take a perpetual interest in his round of small ambitions and contentions. He was not a man of strong character nor a large-minded man, but he was kindly and courteous, and Jane would perhaps have found his home congenial. He would have developed affection probably, and would not have been distracted by wayward inclination. The wish was but coldly formed, but Jane had seen it. She gave it no warm response, but was inclined to meet it. Some vague, virginal fluttering she may have felt, but the important fact was that he was alone and wanted somebody. She was not tired of serving her aunt and cousin, but may have unconsciously missed

### *Episodes*

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the gratitude which she had had in his way from her father and not from them. Their solicitude had soon changed into familiar patronage, varied with occasional light-hearted sarcasm on Geraldine's part. Her own affection continued unreasonably strong, but mingled with vague, half-conscious fear and a sense of subservience. A sort of mesmerism was (without their knowledge) taking the place of uncompelled love.

On a day Mr. Percival found Mrs. Travers alone, and for the first time gave, in a characterless and hesitating manner, expression to his wish. She received it coldly. "I fear, Mr. Percival, it is no use, but of course I'll tell Jane what you have said to me at once. I think it would perhaps be better if she wrote to you."

When she heard the hall door shut on him, she sent for her daughter and told her the news. Geraldine was dismayed.

"Marry?" she said; "then we shall lose her!"

"Yes," said her mother, "that will be a pity, of course. She's a good creature, and I'm

*An Episode in a Commonplace Life*

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thankful we gave her a home. But that's not the point. I don't think Mr. Percival at all the sort of man to make her happy. He's a curious, eccentric person, and has the most extraordinary principles; I am certain he would not be a good husband. Jane is so foolish; she might think it her duty or something. Thank goodness the man spoke to me and not to her."

"What are you going to do?" asked Geraldine.

"Oh, she must be told, of course, and if she's inclined to accept him, we must try to make her see it wouldn't do. She's very fond of us. You must be gentle with her, Gerry."

"I always am."

"Yes, dear, but I daresay she would like more demonstrative affection. Where is she? I had better speak to her at once."

"She's doing something for me upstairs. I'll go and fetch her. What can he see in her?"

"Oh, I don't know, my dear. Those sort of people are always unaccountable."

"It's a mystery," said Geraldine.



### *Episodes*

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"Come and sit by me, dear," said Mrs. Travers, when they entered; "I have something to tell you. Mr. Percival has been talking to me about you—in fact, he seems to want to marry you."

Jane flushed slightly.

"Ah, dear," her aunt continued, looking at her; "listen to me before you say anything. Girls are sometimes flustered in these things. I know the world better than you, and I am certain it would not do. Mr. Percival is an old friend of mine and I like him in a way, but I know he would not make you happy. He spoke more as if he wanted a housekeeper than a wife—marriage without love is a terrible thing. Some day you will see somebody whom you'll really care for. You don't love him, Jane?"

"No," said Jane, after a pause; "not in one way." Mother and daughter exchanged an involuntary glance.

"Then, my dear, think no more about it. You're too young to make a mere contract of marriage. It would be wicked!"

*An Episode in a Commonplace Life*

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"But—but," Jane said, "he has told me about his life. He is very lonely ; I might make things bright for him."

"My dear, self-sacrifice is a beautiful thing, but don't be misled by it. In this case it would be foolish and useless. Mr. Percival's habits are formed. Believe me, in a short time he would long for his bachelor life again."

Geraldine came behind her cousin, leaned over her, and put an arm round her neck. "Darling," she said, "don't leave us for a man you don't love. Some day it may be different. Wait till then. We're very fond of you ; don't go away."

She laid her cheek against her cousin's. Jane gave a little sob of unwonted pleasure and kissed her warmly.

There was a pause, and then Jane said : "I'll go and finish those bows."

"Dear girl," said her aunt, "think over it. Don't fancy I want to dictate to you—if it were a question of real love, I would not say a word.

### *Episodes*

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But remember what I have said ; I mean it for your good."

She patted her niece's face, who took the plump little hand and kissed it. Then she went silently from the room. Mrs. Travers smiled as might smile a complacent saint.

"She's a dear, good thing," she said.

Geraldine walked to the tea-table and cut herself a large slice of cake.

"I think it will be all right," she said.

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It was all right. There were a few more conversations, and then Jane wrote a letter which settled the matter.

These things happened some years ago. Since then Geraldine has made a brilliant marriage, and Jane is become completely mesmerised. A friend said to Mrs. Travers a few days ago : "How nice for you to have your niece, now that you've lost Geraldine !"

"Yes," said Mrs. Travers, complacently and truthfully ; "she's a great comfort."

"I suppose she will never marry."

*An Episode in a Commonplace Life*

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"I expect not ; a man once proposed to her, but she wouldn't have him, and she was quite right. She's very happy and contented, and I like to think I have been like a mother to her, poor dear."

If Mrs. Travers thought about it, she would have no doubt that Jane owed her a great deal. As for Jane she has no life except to be a comfort to her aunt. Possibly her life is not altogether wasted, but it has had no more episodes.

## TWO WOMEN

TO REALISE himself wholly, to understand and visualise to the limit of his intelligence what manner of man he is, is given to nobody on earth. It is a lesser thing to realise one's material position, that wherein, to speak roughly, one's fortune is better or worse than the common. But it is not the habit of ordinary people to realise even this at all extensively : their introspection generally stops at the amount of their incomes.

Geraldine was shrewd and had an instinct for getting the utmost gratification possible out of life : but she was not an extraordinary person. It happened, however, that on one occasion she went far towards realising her comparative advantages. It was three years after her brilliant marriage. She went one day to lunch with her

## *Two Women*

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mother, and arrived at the house half an hour before the time. Her mother was out, and she went up to the room which had been hers and was now devoted to the many tasks of her cousin, Jane Travers. The latter was stooping over the writing-table, and with a look of faint excitement started up. But the young matron was not prodigal of caresses, and told her curtly, with a patronising nod, to go on with what she was doing. She observed the disappointment on her cousin's face, and her plump cheeks dimpled demurely: her cousin's devotion to her, though she did not care to encourage such foolishness, gave her a mild amusement.

She sat down in an arm-chair and lazily watched the other. That Jane, who was intellectual, refined, and capable of a daily complete altruism—not less altruistic because it was a pity—should be altogether devoted to herself, who was commonplace in mind and tastes, a little greedy and absolutely selfish, did not in the least surprise her: she accepted it as a

### *Episodes*

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natural tribute to her beauty and charm. That Jane was content to live with Mrs. Travers, where by the nature of the two she was necessarily a sort of slave, so that she might have a glimpse now and then of her daughter, Geraldine was aware : it did not particularly interest her except in so far as Jane's occasional services and income were convenient to herself. At the present moment she was thinking of the pleasant evening before her, the certainty of an admirable dinner, and the possibility of much amusement afterwards. The sun shone aslant through the window, and passing the stooping figure at the table played with the rings on Geraldine's white hand, drooping indolently over the arm of the chair.

Presently Jane leaned forward on her hand as if in pain, and Geraldine condescended to ask what was the matter.

"Oh, nothing much ; only a headache."

"Why don't you lie down ?" asked Geraldine without concern.

"It's not bad enough for that. I want to get

## *Two Women*

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those accounts you gave me done before lunch. It's very good of you to think of it."

Geraldine answered the look of gratitude with a fat little smile, but said no more. She settled herself more comfortably in the chair, and Jane went on writing.

Then it chanced to occur to Geraldine that it might be an unpleasant thing to add up rows of figures when you have a headache. Thank goodness, she never had a headache. And then she went on to reflect on the satisfactory difference between herself and Jane. Her reflections were a little indistinct, but, put articulately, they amounted to this :

Jane was plain, quite ugly in fact, and had a laborious, monotonous sort of life. She had no pleasure and no friends. Well, she was very weak and silly, and it was really the best thing for her to live with some stronger person. Mrs. Travers and she herself had really been awfully good to her. However, she, Geraldine, was very much better off. She was not a renowned beauty, but she was very pretty indeed, and



### *Episodes*

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there were several people who quite worshipped her. She had a continual round of amusements, of which she was not tired, and she was popular everywhere. She was rich, and had a lovely house and excellent servants. She was a mother, and her little boy gave her no trouble and was everybody's admiration. Yes, she was very fond of him. Her husband idolised her, and—yes—she loved him in a sensible sort of way. But it was she who settled everything. She deserved all this, she told herself. She had no faults ; she could not help it if people cared more for her than she did for them. She was fond of eating, but then somebody had told her that any taste, if refined, was art and a virtue, and she was certainly fastidious. Thank goodness, she had no constitutional tendency to over-stoutness. She was very careful of her health, and rode and walked a good deal. Yes, she deserved all the good fortune. She was not at all too stout.

From your point of view the contrast was a little pathetic.

## *Two Women*

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The woman who was fine and had a potentially abundant intellect and a noble spirit, was spoiled and wasted, spent in voluntary service to one altogether her inferior.

The woman who was quite unfeeling, somewhat coarse in nature, and of a very ordinary intelligence, had to the full every pleasure that a woman in her state of development could appreciate.

But it is ridiculous to be angry with people's imitations.

Geraldine felt no sense of pathos. Her inarticulate thought was, that this is the best of all possible worlds. She took a little glass from her pocket, and after a look at her cousin, gazed placidly at her own face, her very pretty and rosy face. Jane went on adding up figures, occasionally stopping to press her hand to her eyes. Geraldine smiled with satisfaction at the looking-glass, and showed her white, firm teeth.

The luncheon bell rang, and she put away the glass.

"Come, Jane, you ought to be hungry. How

### *Episodes*

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long have you been doing those accounts of mine? It's so sweet of you: I really hadn't time."

"Oh, all the morning, but I've such a headache—I don't think I'll go down."

"Poor Jane! Well, I'm awfully hungry. I rode for two hours this morning. Come, help me up."

She held out her fat little hands. Jane jumped up and took them eagerly.

She held them a moment, as her cousin, smiling radiantly, stood before her.

"Geraldine, how lovely you are!" She stooped and kissed one of the pretty hands, an act of homage which Geraldine took as a tribute to her superior merit.

"Dear thing," she said. "Don't be silly, you're just as good as I am, really. Good-bye!"

She tripped down the stairs, singing, and Jane returned to her figures. She did not feel unhappy then, and the irony of life may not be so great as it seems.

## THE EPISODE OF JOHNSON

THERE was an event in the life of Geraldine which I regard as an episode ; for though it was a climax to the other person concerned, it was but an episode to her, and she was by far the more important and useful member of society. Reading it, a sentimental person might suppose it an exposition of villainy on her part, which is not the case. Her conduct was natural, and may be easily explained ; and apart from the absurdity of blaming anybody for anything, I cannot see that a nature which is merely unthinkingly selfish and a little imperceptive of other people's feelings, and is otherwise thoroughly healthy, is an ill thing in the world. Or it may be thought that in the case of the man it involves the study of a disagreeably morbid character, and

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objected that all scribbling should be healthy. To such an objection there is an answer on the same plane: that the moral, which is that a disagreeably morbid person generally goes to the wall, is good and pleasant. I think this man would have gone off his head some day, and ended as his did, if Geraldine had never lived.

He was a young man called Johnson, and came from Cambridge, where the beginning of his career had been brilliant and the end insignificant, to town to read for the Bar. The story ought to make his character evident without description, but it may be noted that, for all his absurdity, his intellect was not quite futile. He had a few hundreds a year, the capital of which was very wrongly in his own control. Meeting Mrs. Travers, he was asked to go to see her, and having gone, went frequently. He found they were fond of going to the play, and invented a fiction, which Mrs. Travers saw no reason to disbelieve, to the effect that he knew several theatrical people,

### *The Episode of Johnson*

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who gave him boxes and stalls at all the popular plays. Mrs. Travers did not scruple to make free use of this convenience, and in return allowed him to come to tea as often as he chose, which was perhaps thoughtlessly kind.

This of course was in the days before Geraldine made her brilliant marriage. When the three were alone Johnson made no secret of the fact that to him this girl was a goddess. Therefore Mrs. Travers, being a sensible mother, took an early occasion to tell him, quite intelligibly, that Geraldine, being a sensible daughter, would certainly never fall in love with or marry him. Here was a clear position, and a manly, self-respecting man would either have taken himself off or made a compact with himself to win the girl for all her sense.

But here first appeared Johnson's morbidity. I do not know if I understand rightly his character, though I have observed it in action. I fancy that his passion went, so to speak, to

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his head. It was certainly strong, but seemed to take the form—usually the secondary consequence of desire—of wishing to benefit the object of it, and that exclusively. Some radical weakness of character there may have been, and yet on his own particular lines his passion never faltered nor swerved. It happened as a secondary cause that a sort of foolish Quixotism with regard to women had been his habitual ideal. There was also the coincidence that at this time Geraldine, who was by no means stupid, saw much of a young poet, and picked up his phrases and theories, of a rather vague and flowery kind. It was therefore easy for Johnson to consider her a very spiritual being, who should be worshipped as it were in the clouds. However all this may be, he replied to Mrs. Travers that he never supposed that Geraldine would give him more than a moderate regard, that she was for somebody a million times better than he was, and that he was content merely to see her sometimes. Mrs. Travers, despising him in

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her heart, was amused as well and disposed to be kindly; she said she would allow him to come to them just the same if he really understood. And he vowed she was kinder to him than any one else had ever been, and that he could never be grateful enough, and she began insensibly to patronise him as one dependent on her good nature.

She repeated the matter to her daughter, with a certain touch of humour. It is not to be supposed that a healthy and vigorous young woman full of animal spirits, as was Geraldine, could respect such an attitude on the part of a man, nor indeed was it respectable. Possibly there was (for it was genuine) an element of pathos in it, but neither the mother, whose only trouble was her double chin, nor the daughter, who had no trouble at all, could be expected to be readily perceptive of pathetic elements. Geraldine's feelings were a mixture of vanity and irritation. The consequences were that vanity forbade her to send him away, and irritation impelled her to snub and to tyrannise over him. This was exactly



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the conduct to tie and to make him more ridiculous, until, exercise increasing the love of power, the snubbing and tyranny reached a point where downright cruelty begins, which was Johnson's fault, whose morbid submission brought out a latent quality. He, for his part, used to spend his time away from her in trying to frame excuses for her, and to believe her the spiritual goddess she had been, and so powerful is passion that he generally succeeded. While she, to whom his various humours were incomprehensible, and who had no idea of the extent of his perturbations, never troubled herself about him in his absence. Once her mother, laughing, after his departure, said : "You are dreadfully cruel to him, Gerry."

"Perhaps," said Geraldine, in pensive amusement, "perhaps I am ; but when you know you can make any one squirm like that, it's so hard not to."

Her cruelty had been innocent enough, but for that morbid strain in Johnson which she could never understand. Mrs. Travers would

### *The Episode of Johnson*

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sometimes console him, and bid him not to mind, when his gratitude would be extreme. Once, however, she found her part of comforter impossible. He was with them in the brougham returning from a play, and received Geraldine's abuse of the dinner, the theatre, and all his conduct and conversation thereat, with so absurd a piteousness that the other two were forced to mingle their laughter. That occasion, had there been the faintest gift of humour in Johnson, would have been his salvation. But there was not, and as he drove home in a hansom afterwards, he stared vacantly out of it, with no eye for the nightly beauty of London nor sense of the fresh breeze in his face.

Thereafter came the time when the preliminary stages of Geraldine's brilliant marriage were in course of completion, and then Johnson became a nuisance. Perhaps some spark of manly rivalry was aroused in him. Its expression, if it existed, was in sullen ill-temper, and though Geraldine left her tyranny now for the most part, he remained unamiable, and did

### *Episodes*

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not always affect amiability before their world. He became at last intolerable and impossible, and had to be told to go away—at least until the brilliant marriage was over. This task Mrs. Travers accomplished with vigorous exasperation. Johnson went down on his knees, and was otherwise contemptible and uncomfortable, and she, as she told her daughter, very nearly boxed his ears. She was obdurate, as she had to be, to his apologies and promises, and so he went away. He went away also from all respectable society, and the Traverses soon forgot him.

Now, if Johnson's nature had not been thoroughly morbid, it would have righted itself, if ever, now. Family affection, or the society of Lais, might have saved him to a reasonable extent. But he had no family, and was so constituted that the society of no woman of Lais' sort was tolerable in his affliction. Some sane woman of the world of his own class might have extracted his confidence and appeased him in time, but no such woman was his familiar friend, and he gave himself no chance of meeting one.

### *The Episode of Johnson*

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He relapsed into vacuous brooding, and became in due time a confirmed monomaniac. He thought of but one subject till it altogether filled his existence. He had, I think, no inherited tendency to suicide, but made constant use of a drug which not infrequently creates one. His men friends fell away, and then he lived alone in his chambers, shaky and prematurely old.

Two years after her marriage he stopped Geraldine near her home in Park Lane. She did not recognise him at first, and when she did wished she had gone on. But he was a vague memory, and she thought it hardly worth while to make a little scene. "Mr. Johnson!" she said, not altogether ungraciously. "How ill you're looking!"

"I ventured to stop you," he said huskily, "because I'm going away the day after to-morrow for the rest of my life, and I want to say something to you first."

He begged for an interview with her somewhere alone, and she, after much demur, rather crossly made an appointment for the next after-

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noon at her mother's house. Johnson had been living on his capital, and had now about two hundred pounds left at the Bank. The following morning he drew it out in bank-notes, and spent all but a few pounds on a bracelet. He put it in his pocket, and paced the streets for hours, brooding, and unconsciously making way for people, resting now and then in the Park.

At the appointed time he went to Mrs. Travers' house, and was shown into her boudoir. In half an hour Geraldine came in unconcernedly. The two were a rather violent contrast. He was very thin, ill, and somewhat shabby, with a trembling, vacuous stare. She, who had been plump, had grown plumper, though the full lines of her figure were graceful enough, was a freshly radiant embodiment of health and solid delights, looked calm and withal alert. She was quite at her ease, gave him an interrogative glance, and sat her comfortably down. As she slowly pulled off a glove he, not bearing to look at her face, gazed at the hand she uncovered, a very pretty hand, though not artistic in shape and

### *The Episode of Johnson*

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perhaps too fat : it was small and very white, and with many rings. Johnson gazed at it as at a sacred thing.

"I want first to ask you to forgive me—you won't see me again—for acting as I did just before you married."

She smiled slightly and nodded.

"Oh, well," she said, "we'll forget all that. Where are you going to?"

"Oh, right away. Will you do me a great favour? I want you to accept this thing as a sort of memento and sign of forgiveness."

She took the bracelet and looked at it critically.

"Oh, no, Mr. Johnson ; I really can't."

But he persisted, asked her to regard it as a wedding present, said he could easily afford it, and so on. Finally, she accepted it as one doing a great favour. He spoke vaguely of his journey, and then he said good-bye, stooping awkwardly over her careless hand, and went. Geraldine sat looking at the bracelet a minute or two, humming a tune. As for Johnson, he

### *Episodes*

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walked back to his chambers and did that which the papers related the next day.

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"It's dreadful, dreadful!" said Geraldine.

"Yes, terrible, poor fellow; but of course he was mad at the moment. He must have had some trouble we knew nothing about."

"You don't think I ought to tell anybody about his coming to see me here?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Travers with decision. "His coming here had nothing to do with his suicide. For goodness' sake, don't mix yourself up with it. Nobody knew him."

"Well," said Geraldine, "I'm glad I forgave him, and we parted friends."

They spoke of other things.

I cannot see that Johnson had any reasonable complaint against them; they never affected any regard they did not feel, and were quite ordinary people.

## A REASONABLE HUSBAND

WHEN the other man was gone, the husband walked to the fire and stood with his back to it, looking down on his wife. He was a tall, well-built fellow, whose admirable frock-coat became him and who would have looked well in armour; he was bald in an intellectual sort of way, had an imperial and a pointed moustache and very bright eyes. The wife was huddled in her chair, her disarranged, fluffy hair falling over the thin long hands in which her face was buried. He looked down on her with his thick, black eyebrows bent and his lips compressed. But after a while his face cleared and he gave a twist to his moustache.

"Do you mind," he said, "if I smoke a cigar?"

She looked up hurriedly and in perplexity,



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her mouth twitching. It was a pretty face, but thin and a little haggard. The eyes, which had not been weeping, were watery and weak. The husband looked at her without changing his smile. He unbuttoned his coat and took out a cigar-case.

"I know," he said, "it's rather a theatrical thing to do under the circumstances, but I really want to talk at my ease."

"At your ease!" she muttered.

"Oh, yes, at my ease. I'm aware it would flatter your vanity more if I tore my hair, what there is of it, and addressed inflated observations to God. But I really can't go so far in politeness as that. On the other hand, I don't intend to say anything unamiable to you. So do make yourself comfortable. We can't help the situation having a dramatic element in it, but we needn't have a regular scene. Tell me, how long have you been—unfaithful to me?"

The wife rose and walked to and fro.

"What right have you to upbraid me? How

*A Reasonable Husband*

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long were you faithful to me? You! How many women, since we married——”

She stopped in front of him. He laughed, a laugh of simple amusement.

“Admirable! You have been reading what's-its-name. But, my dear child, we are not people in a book. It's a little off the point, but I really must explain to you. If I were an ordinary, normal sort of husband, the answer to that *tu quoque* of yours would be easy: these are matters of emotion, not of reason; one of the strongest emotions in a normal husband is the desire to have exclusive possession of his wife; he acts accordingly; his own conduct away from her is irrelevant. However, I'm not a normal husband, and whatever you may have been to me when we were married, I care nothing now whether you are unfaithful or not. Absolutely (I assure you) my only grievance against you is that you have compelled me to find you out. You really have not played the game.”

The wife had looked at him blankly: she

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turned and walked quickly again across the room and back.

"Yes, it's a harsh thing perhaps to say, but you really have not played the game. All I asked, tacitly of course, was that you should not make me ridiculous. I never made you so; I have never asked you to receive my mistress or anything of that sort. Whereas you—in my own house——" He shrugged his shoulders and flipped the ash from his cigar.

"You see," he continued, "you place me in a very tiresome dilemma. I must either divorce you and quarrel with a man with whom I am not in the least angry—he's one of my oldest friends and has only acted as I have acted many times—or I must put myself in the ridiculous position of the forgiving husband and allow him to laugh at me. Think! I must either quarrel with a man who was my chum at school, or appear absurd to him. See what you women do!"

He laughed in pleasant enjoyment of his jest.

### *A Reasonable Husband*

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"I'm making rather a long speech, I'm afraid. I'll come to practical details. Of course I shall not divorce you: I dare say he'll understand. It suits me to be married, and I detest advertisement. Been paying servants, and that sort of thing, to keep the secret?"

The wife spoke at last.

"O you devil!" she said; "you insulting devil!"

"My dear soul, I'm sure I take things with admirable good-nature. But come, tell me; I don't care for servants to be laughing at me downstairs."

"Only one, my maid. She knew—I gave her some things and some money."

"That rather pretty girl? Well, if one must be blackmailed, it's pleasant to be blackmailed by anybody so nice. Give her my love, if you like, and tell her if she holds her tongue I'll set her up in a public-house, or a shop, or something. But for God's sake be discreet. We'll live apart as much as pos-

### *Episodes*

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sible; but, as I said, it suits me to have a wife and a respectable house and that sort of thing."

The wife went from the room, sobbing.

The husband's smile vanished, and he stood like a stone for five minutes by the ticking clock. Then he, too, left the room without throwing anything down and shut the door quietly.

## THE END OF A POSE

BASIL and George had finished their last dinner together, before Basil went back to school. Basil was sixteen, and George was his elder brother. All through the Easter holidays they had lived alone at George's house in Suffolk ; there was no sport, and they had loafed about together, talking, and talked far into every night. The twelve years between them made little difference in their converse ; they had seen nothing of one another for some years, and appeared as strangers whom similar attitudes and tastes made quickly intimate. Basil was an extraordinarily precocious boy, dreamy and indolent, who in pursuit of an elder's idea was quite unconscious of his boyhood. George had been much the same at his age, and had altered little in essentials ; to him his brother, so pro-

### *Episodes*

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vocative of memories, and so remote from criticism of himself—a man who had no cordial man-friend in the world—was strangely attractive. He listened with a curious interest to immature indications of himself, and himself spoke freely. There was a great sympathy between the man who was appreciated and the boy who was understood. Had they been of an age, they would perhaps have quarrelled, as men who are alike in their waywardness generally quarrel; as it was, they found a complement in one another. Since George had been of age his father had not spoken to him, and now his father was dead, and he had come to his house for the first time for seven years, and his brother had joined him for his holidays. George's wife remained in London.

The brothers sat with a few dishes of fruit between them at one end of the long table in the big dining-room; they had pale blue eyes and straw-coloured hair, were both slight, and both leaned back languidly in the big chairs, which had high carved backs, and the obvious

*The End of a Pose*

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difference was only that the elder was a little bald and clean-shaven, and the younger had an incipient moustache.

"Port, Basil?"

"Thanks; I'll stick to the champagne."

"Any left?" George asked, with a slight laugh.

Basil met his brother's smile frankly. "It's in the family," he said, and jerked his head back in the direction of a portrait, the portrait of a worthy who had come to his own with Charles Stuart, and was supposed to have been continuously drunk from that time to his death.

"He had a better constitution than either of us," said George; "but, as you say, it's in the family. Ring for another bottle if you want it. I'm sorry it's our last night, old man."

"You'd be sorrier if you had to go back to that beastly place I have to; there's hardly a soul there I care for."

"Yes, I suppose it is a rough sort of place. You don't care for games and that sort of thing?"



### *Episodes*

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"Loathe them. I'm only tolerated because they're such snobs, and you have a title and all that."

"That's bad, too ; it won't hurt you, though. I don't think you'll be a snob."

"I've no excuse."

"No, but lots of chaps who have no excuse are snobs all the same, with just the same snobbery as though they were grocers ; they don't even invent a special variety. Now, these people"—he looked round on the portraits—"were most of them blackguards, but they weren't snobs. I suppose they had no occasion to stand on their dignity, or couldn't sell their dignity as we do. I wish you'd gone to Eton, though I suppose the old boy simply wanted you to do everything differently from me ; idiot——"

"He was good to me, George."

There was silence for a moment, and both emptied their glasses. Then the younger brother spoke nervously.

"George, don't tell me if you don't want to ;

*The End of a Pose*

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but you know you asked me if he ever spoke of you. Why was it you quarrelled?"

George looked very hard at his younger brother.

"He believed things about me which I could not disprove. But that was only the last straw. We never hit it off : he was a sportsman, and I was not ; I was rather a prig, too, and showed him I thought his life rather empty. He never sympathised with me. Few people have. I'm glad we're friends, Basil. Don't be afraid to tell me things ; I've been much worse than ever you'll be. If you can't stand school, of course you can leave. But better stick to it a bit longer ; it helps one with men, and with your temperament you'll need all you can to stand well with them. Every one to his boredom ; you go back to school and I go back to my wife. Probably we have the same kind of sinking feeling. We'll have some more drinks."

They sat in silence until the butler had brought in a fresh bottle of port. Then George looked at his brother. "Shocked?" he asked.

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The other laughed uncomfortably. Of course not."

"But you are—that's affectation. You're afraid I should not think you a man of the world. Don't be angry, old man; I didn't mean to be rude. You were shocked, not at what I said, but at my saying it. I suppose it was mean of me, but you're the only person in the world I should say it to—simply because I have no intimates. In a few years you'll be hardened in that way too; at present, delicacy with you isn't merged in indifference."

"I've only seen her once. She's very clever, isn't she?"

"Very clever; she'll argue about heaps of things by the hour—and so stupid that she talked to you as if you were an ordinary boy. It's her cleverness that bores me. She's interested in all sorts of things, and up to a certain point is thoroughly intelligent about them. On her own plane she reasons better than any woman I ever knew. She gets up meetings and writes letters to the papers, and is a most

*The End of a Pose*

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energetic citizen. I daresay she does almost as much good as harm. I know she bores me to death."

"She's fond of you, George?"

"My dear, she detests me. It's her cleverness that bores me, and it's my cleverness that exasperates her. She knows that I understand the things she cares about, and simply think them uninteresting. If I were a stupid man, even though I didn't care for them, she wouldn't mind so much. It's my attitude of superiority, which I can't help, that maddens her. I despise her interests and she despises me."

"Why?"

"Because she thinks I waste my abilities and am selfish and retrograde, and so forth. Besides, she's healthy and vigorous, and I'm corrupt and effete."

The boy did not understand how that last sentence belied his brother's previous statements.

"Why did you marry?"

"Because her good looks, and vigour, and unconventionality appealed to myjaded senses,

### *Episodes*

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I suppose, and she thought she liked me perhaps ; and there was the tin. I don't mean she was sordid ; she saw an opportunity of furthering her pet schemes."

"Well, at any rate, she doesn't care for anybody more."

"I wish to God she would."

"Now, it's your turn for affectation."

"I tell you, Basil, the people we wish to get rid of—wish would die, sometimes—are not the people who injure us. They're the people who bore us. Laura's absolutely reasonable in theory, up to a certain point, and like so many women now-a-days confines herself to theory in matters where mere theory is worthless. No doubt she thinks it an anachronism that two people who don't suit each other should be tied for their lives, and if she were logical in practice, she'd go away. She ought to run away with some sporting fellow who hunted five days a week and thought she was a prophetess. She bores me with her tedious reforms, and she despises me because I'm effete, as I said."

### *The End of a Pose*

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Once again the boy failed to see the inconsistency.

"I wonder you——" said he.

"Oh, as long as she puts up with me. . . . She ought to bolt, but since she won't. . . . Now make your confession to me, and we'll be quits."

Basil, flushed, seemed on the point of speaking. But his brother was obviously gone in a reverie, and he walked to a window and looked out on the rain. When he turned round George was emptying the decanter, and had spilled some wine on the cloth.

The butler came in with a telegram. George held it in front of him for two minutes, and then held it to his brother. The butler left the room.

Basil read it. "Good God!" he said.

His brother said nothing, and Basil spoke again falteringly.

"George, you know what I think. I'm dreadfully sorry."

"Thanks, old man. A curious comment, isn't it? Let's have our coffee upstairs; it's more comfortable."

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He finished his wine, and rose from the table, while his brother stood looking at the floor.

Then he laughed, harshly.

"Damn it, Basil," he said, "which of us is acting the most?"

## A NOTE ON THE LAST EPISODE

LAURA and her best friend were in Laura's particular study. Laura was at the writing-table, her friend in a big arm-chair before the fire. The room was severe; a few architectural engravings, a great many shelves of books, two other tables covered with books and papers. A pair of boxing gloves hung a little ostentatiously on the wall. The woman in the arm-chair was sinuous and thin, her hair was black, and she had large black eyes; her face was pale and long; the nose thin and long; the thin lips, that were now curled a little derisively, were long; her throat was beautifully moulded, and the hand that rested on the arm of the chair was thin and long and white. She was of a type of woman that you seldom see in old portraits. Her smile



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was directed towards a photograph at which she was looking.

Laura drew a broad unnecessary line under the "E.C." of the envelope she had directed, and wheeled round her chair to face the other. The big eyes of her friend looked up and took her in calmly—the broad forehead and square chin, the brown, honest eyes and full lips, the round breasts—the friend was rather flat-chested—the capable little hands and awkward pose ; the full whole of ripe young womanhood. Laura rose and walked to the fire. She moved with a certain irritation ; her dress was commonplace, and as it were a grudging concession. The dress of the other, who followed her with her persistent smile, was all lace and subtle folds. A little less intellect in Laura's face, and a little more grace, and she would have fitted an old portrait passing well.

"What have you there?" she asked.  
"George's photo? Isn't it—like him?"

"It doesn't flatter him, but it's not a bad likeness ; the delicacy of the face——"

*A Note on the Last Episode*

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"Give it to me."

She took it and tore it in half with her strong little fingers and threw it into the fire.

"My dear!" murmured her best friend.

Laura looked down at her in silent defiance, until she asked :

"Have you heard from him lately?"

"Yes. He's coming back in a week. Basil—his brother, you know—is coming with him on his way to school."

"What sort of boy is that?"

"Oh, very like George."

"In other words?"

"In other words, an effeminate, morbid, sickening creature——"

"My dear!"

"You know very well how things are between me and George."

"Laura, I'm going to preach to you."

"Well?"

"You're utterly unreasonable. You've no real grievance against your husband because his tastes are different from yours."

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"It's not that."

"You think it good to be in the front of things, to help on modern movements, and all that. His view is that things develop, and that it's no good people meddling with them. I agree with you, but I can quite understand his not sympathising."

"It's not that."

"He lets you go your own way——"

"It's not that."

"And it's not fair to insist that he shall do exactly as you. He's extremely clever in his own way——"

"Yes, yes!"

"And understands all those things, only they don't interest him. Why not give and take?"

"Take what? But it's not that, it's not that. What a hypocrite you are!"

"I want to make things——"

"Yes, yes, I know. I know you're a real friend, dearest ; but you're on a wrong tack. Of course I disapprove of his life ; in any reasonable society he'd be made to work or starve."

*A Note on the Last Episode*

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She smiled a little forlornly. "But that's not it. You talk as if I were some mad, rampant female, and he were a quiet, common-sense husband. You *know* it's not that. He's so weak."

"Mentally, morally, or physically?"

"Not the first, but the others—yes, both of them. He's so unmanly. I feel—— Oh!"

She walked up and down the room with quick, nervous steps.

"Do you know, one day I struck him."

"Laura!"

"Yes. I came in here one day and saw him at the table reading a report of—never mind—which I'd copied out. He was smiling over it—you don't know how the thing had moved me—and when he came to the end—he didn't see me come in—he leaned back and laughed out loud, I went up and hit him on the face."

"Laura!"

"If he'd beaten me—if he'd done anything like a man——"

"What *did* he do?"

"He spoke in his quiet, sarcastic way—and I

## *Episodes*

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knew he was really hurt, because there was a great mark on his face—and treated me as if I were simply an ill-bred child. Why should I live with a man like that? If I had known what his life was when I married him! You don't know what things I have learned since."

"I can guess. Is he fond of you?"

Laura looked down. "If—if I could be sure he was not. Like a spaniel—sometimes he seems to—oh, yes; he sometimes won't leave me alone. Do you know that day I hit him, after saying all the sarcastic things he could think of, he came after me as I was going out of the room, and asked me to forgive him! Oh, it makes me sick, sick!—If he had beaten me——"

"What do you want?"

"I want a man. He might be stupid, or coarse, and care for nothing but hunting; he might forbid me to speak in public" (she laughed a little bitterly), "and tear up all I wrote; but if he were a man, I could be happy. A man!"

*A Note on the Last Episode*

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She sat down by the writing-table and leaned her head on her hand.

Her best friend frowned and seemed to think. Then she rose, and with a light in her big eyes went to the table and laid a long white hand on the other's shoulder.

"Laura!" she said, in a low, musical voice; "darling, I understand. I see now what it is. I really thought it was that he didn't care for your interests, and all that. Now I see. Laura, my dear, you're simply a woman unsatisfied: you ought to have a plain, strong husband and children to look after. All your movements and theories mean simply that. My darling, whatever you do—I guess what you're going to do, though I don't know who it is—remember I'm your friend. I think you're right, and whatever the world says, I'll stick to you. You're too sensible to care what the stupid world says. And as to his being fond of you, don't be deceived; he may care for you in his way now, but in a year he won't think any more about it. Don't sacrifice your

happiness for *that*. Now I'm going. Good-bye, my darling."

Laura rose and kissed her and sat down again.

Her best friend went out and got into a cab. As she drove off she took a letter from her pocket. "I always turn to you," a sentence in it ran, "and bore you with my troubles. But you understand me; would to God my wife did! I sometimes think— Never mind."

The woman smiled and put the letter carefully away.

"If he divorces her," reflected Laura's best friend, "it won't make any difference to her whom he marries afterwards. Oh, the comfort of being out of debt!"

## A RECONCILIATION

GERALD MANNERING lived in one of the gayest sets in London. Most of the men and women in it wrote, or acted, or painted. The actors were men and women of genius, as are all actors. Those of the set who wrote and painted were, intellectually and artistically, on the outermost fringe of their professions—financially they prospered. They drew things for the papers and were extremely artistic, or wrote paragraphs for the papers about “first nights” and bonnets, and were very literary indeed. There were a few stray barristers and stockbrokers in the set, and a few people who did absolutely nothing, of whom Gerald Mannering was one.

How he had drifted there I do not know. It suited him pretty well. He was gay, and



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at least superficially good-natured, as were the others, and had capacity to enjoy the moment, and to take nobody and nothing very seriously. He liked the free manners and rushing about in cabs, and champagne in the early morning.

But he did not marry into this gay set. Gerald in town and Gerald in the country were two people. It was an old family, of which Gerald and his father and some distant cousins were all that remained, and had a rather tumble-down old house in a rather neglected park. The elder Mannering lived there all the year round, doing nothing very comfortably; and Gerald in the country used to potter about with a gun when there was anything to shoot, smoke interminable pipes, and hold solemn discourse with his father.

Their neighbour was a marquis—not a fashionable marquis at all, but a very simple country gentleman, a reader of substantial histories, and interested in flocks and herds.

### *A Reconciliation*

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His wife was dead, having left him three girls, clever, high-spirited, and perfectly thoroughbred. It was not the Gerald who rushed about to music-halls who married, but the Gerald who was quite happy pottering about with a gun ; and he married his old playmate, Lady Emily.

Lady Emily's mother had died a year after the girl had come out, but had lived long enough to have trained her daughter as few girls are trained. This training had been a veritable school of love, where a naturally single-hearted and brave nature had been informed with all that is fair in tradition. She had known nothing of unreasoned repression and dictated points of view. Her quick intellect and strong affections had been developed imperceptibly to herself ; her habits imperceptibly formed in the ways of graciousness and health. The result was a rare girl indeed, a girl with a natural outlook in life, neither prurient nor prudish, with a mind informed and ready, and with a perfect manner. Gerald Mannering admitted she was far too

good for him, but did not reflect very much on the disparity. And she had a great affection for him. For the last two years, since her mother's death, she had lived very much in the country.

So Gerald Mannering, aged twenty-five, and his wife, aged twenty-one, came to set up house in South Kensington, and to them came flocking Gerald's set : Tom from his theatre, and Dick from Monte Carlo, and Harry from durance vile in Holloway. His wife liked these men fairly well ; they were cosmopolitan and talked amiable nonsense. Some of the women also of the set she met, and these she liked less. Those who had reached a hand to Society (as they spelled it) from Bohemia (as it still is called) had too many middle-class proprieties for her tastes ; those who had reached a hand the other way, too few restrictions. They made more fuss about her than she liked.

Gerald Mannering had not rushed back to his old life. He could not suddenly drop a number of people who were for the most part harmless,

### *A Reconciliation*

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nor refrain from going to ordinary places of resort. But he had wished to devote himself to his wife, and grudged at first that anybody should spoil their *tête-à-tête*. The inevitable change was quick. He could not help discovering that his wife, if not his superior, was at least other than he. She was gay and affectionate, and never snubbed him; but he had wit to feel that to her his brandy-and-soda jokes were somewhat crude, his fragments of hackneyed "cynicism" exceedingly silly. On a day, a woman of their acquaintance brought another woman to the house, a very advanced woman, who discoursed on equal right for the sexes, the marriage laws, and the like, to whom he listened with respect, as to a clever and enlightened person: when she was gone his wife made utter ridicule of her, proving her loud views and theories due merely to lack of education and to confusion of thought. He was vaguely angry and abashed, and the incident was typical. The people of his set who talked about literature and philo-

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sophy looked up to this woman, and he had not been taught to consider the intellect of his wife.

As for Lady Emily, she was accustomed to face her feelings, and admitted that Gerald in the country, talking unaffectedly to his father and rambling contentedly with her, was a different person from Gerald in town, keen about new plays and admiring women she herself despised. Affection, which had not been her extreme capacity of passion, could not shut from her the recognition of a lower nature and an altogether inferior intellect. She was a true and loyal girl, and did not treat the world to her confidence. They had no children, and drifted naturally apart.

Gerald drifted to a little woman who drove about smiling in a one-horse victoria. She was almost as pretty and quite as delightfully artificial as her bonnets ; had big, unsatisfied eyes, and a tremulous mouth that was too red. Gerald fluttered about with her in restaurants and picture-galleries, and was quite happy and

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proud in listening to her complaints that somebody else had sixty pounds a week and she but twenty; that the public *et cetera*; that art and so forth.

Lady Emily drifted to a prig, an old-young man, bland, passionless, and well-bred. He was indubitably well-educated, and the superior standpoint from which, evenly ironical, he contemplated his fellow-creatures, was attractive to Gerald Mannering's wife. So Gerald became somewhat heavily trivial; Lady Emily somewhat trivially bitter.

Then there came an episode, and they live together very comfortably now. For you tire of silly confidences, and a woman for whom you have affection, does when she begins to disdain you, attract desire—so you be neither perverse or inordinately conceited. Gerald courted his wife with passion, as men court a mistress, and appealed to something the old-young man had not influenced. So passion first, and then custom produced harmony. The commonplace soul and the soul that was fine lived comfortably

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together and owed their comfort to the flesh. It is not worth enlarging upon, but worth the indication, for it is the reverse that most often happens.

## AN ACT OF INTROSPECTION

ROBERT CUNNINGHAM stooped, picked up the handkerchief, and, raising his hat, gave it to the girl. As she and her companion walked away, he heard her say in a low voice, and with a little laugh, "What a nice old gentleman!" Robert Cunningham walked on at the same pace, but when he came to the turning across the fields, he leaned against the gate and stood with his eyes on the ground. Presently he threw back his head with a sort of defiance and looked round about him, and the trees and hedges took no account of him. We, if you please, will be kinder.

There is surely a certain pathos when one who has played the part of a young man all his life hears for the first time, and from a girl, that he is old. An ordinary country girl drops



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her handkerchief: a man passing by stoops slowly and a little painfully to pick it up, and when she looks at him she perceives he is bald and wrinkled: "What a nice old gentleman!" The exclamation was very natural. But the pathos of it all was that Robert Cunningham was only forty-two. One really old in years and made up as a young man, skipping on gouty old feet and showing his false teeth horribly, is possibly pathetic, but is certainly ridiculous, and most of us can but laugh when the truth is told to him. His is not the charm of artificiality. But to play a young man's part naturally, because no other occurred to one, to feel fitted for no other, to have been conscious for long that one is tired, and suddenly, at an age when many men are truly young, to be told that one is old, and to feel the truth of it—that is another matter.

Of course Robert Cunningham had faced the question before to a certain extent. When a young man, after a day's acquaintance, still gave him his prefix, or when he remarked that

### *An Act of Introspection*

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he had instinctively unfastened a gate instead of climbing a stile, he grumbled and said he was growing old. But then he would refer to the tale of his years, and laugh the idea away, or somebody would laugh for him, and point to So-and-so, who was "going strong" at sixty. Sometimes, again, in reading a funny story, he would pause in a late smile to reflect that he was not smiling spontaneously, but because it was the sort of thing at which he had been wont to laugh; but then he would count it a mere fancy of introspection. As for love—one could not of course be an enthusiastic boy for ever. The light-o'-loves of Robert Cunningham's acquaintance naturally encouraged the idea that youth remained with him. But now an unprejudiced country girl, who had never seen him before, had given him to understand that he was old—and he believed it.

You perceive that Robert Cunningham had the habit of self-introspection. Discontented *roués* are common enough, but a discontented *roué* with the ruin of what might have been a

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fine intellect, and a habit of self-introspection, is pitiable indeed. Leaning against the gate, he tried to think this matter out, balancing the *pros* and *cons* of his past; and reckoning the chances of his future.

He put the matter to himself very plainly, more plainly than you would care to read. Wine and women! Brandy and "love-machines!" The inheritance of an instinct in excess had ruined him, as it has ruined others; but it is not unprofitable to observe how his course of life had helped it. You have in the beginning a youth with a bright intellect and a strong body, and an abnormally strong instinct; given plenty of hard work for the two former, or either of them, and the last-named had been held in check. Robert Cunningham went from Eton to Oxford for a year, and then through the militia into the Guards. At twenty-one he became master of fifteen thousand a year. He was asked to do little work with his hands and less with his head and his life was a series of liaisons. A

great passion might with a happy conclusion have saved him. But the society in which he lived did not produce great passions ; a society—it was by no means the average society of London—in which marriage was a formality and a speculation, and irregular connections more facile than permanent. It differed from the society in which the last Lord Hertford lived, and which Disraeli described, that society whose members recognised that “on many subjects the public are the victims of very vulgar prejudices, which they wished neither to disturb nor to adopt,” for that there, we are told, though things were done, words were not said. Robert Cunningham’s society was free of speech, and therein sacrificed, it may be, a good deal ; otherwise it was civilised, and tolerant, and pleasant—but it did not produce great passions. Robert Cunningham thought he had one for his wife, the girl who had been coerced into marrying him, and ran away—she was a little insane, people said—in the honeymoon. Thereon he went back to the

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connection he had broken off a few months before, but though lovers returning after truancy are proverbially fervent, this did not produce what he required.

It was at this period he discovered that nothing made him feel so fit as a glass of brandy. He began also to feel that a settled and steady affection would be his salvation, and to watch his sensations, hoping and questioning. This was, of course, the worst thing he could have done ; it was one result of an unoccupied mind. He was sure he felt a real and wholesome passion for a girl in his own set, who disgusted him by her flirtations with the most offensive cad he had ever met. He was sure he felt a passion, strange and transforming, for the girl he took out of a tobacconist's shop in Madrid, and as he mused, leaning against the gate, he shuddered, remembering the boredom of that winter in Spain.

His intellect was of the sort that men of science, not artists, have, an analytic intellect. He could not accept life as a pretty picture, an

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amusing book. He wanted something practical, and he wandered restlessly in a maze of intrigue. A fit of reading ended always in the same way : it was no use now ; he was uneducated ; it was too late to begin ; it was all hopeless ; he drank his brandy and went back to the woman of the time. He contrived once to go among people whose cleverness was acknowledged, and they snubbed and flattered him back to his liaisons.

And now at forty-two he was bald and wrinkled. He was jaded and bored in one direction, and had not vitality to begin in another. He was intelligent enough to recognise the wasting of his life and its causes ; that was all. Many another man with such a life as his, would have lived in Paradise ; this man craved for something else, and had never found it. The village postman passed him and touched his hat, and "there," he mused, "save for the grace of the Devil, goes Robert Cunningham !"

That evening, for the first time in his life, at

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least when women of his own class were present, Robert Cunningham drank too much wine at dinner, and his hostess for the first time frowned on him.

One can guess the sort of end he will make.

## THE ROMANCE OF BOBBY GORDON

TOWARDS the end of a hot June Bloomsbury is not a refreshing quarter of the town, and on a particularly hot afternoon the milkman ceased to be raucous, a policeman stood limply, the very cats went wearily in Mecklenburgh Square. Bobby Gordon, strolling along the north side of it, pitied the poor fellows he supposed to be turning out hack literature in every other house, and tilted his hat farther back on his head as he thought of them. A little woman who writes articles about fashion, as she took out the key of her house, looked sharply at Bobby, who was unquestionably one of the best dressed men in London, and thought she recognised an air of St. James's Street about him. Bobby sauntered on, quite unconscious that he was out of place.



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He could not have understood the little woman's astonishment had she known that he had just got down from a King's Cross omnibus. She did not know that if the butcher, whose cart was standing at Bobby's door in Grosvenor Street when he came out, had offered him a lift to Mecklenburgh Square, Bobby would quite possibly have taken his seat there with perfect unconcern.

His wife had asked him at lunch what he was going to do in the afternoon.

"Going to see a friend in Mecklenburgh Square."

"A literary man?"

"No—a woman ; a very old friend of mine. I got a letter from her this morning ; she'd only just heard I was in town. I haven't seen her since we were married."

"Is she married?"

"No ; she lives by herself in lodgings."

His wife looked at him with a curious little smile. She was small and pretty and charmingly dressed ; she was ever so

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slightly rouged, and had rather too many rings.

"Shall I be presented to her?"

"I don't expect you'd hit it off," he said.

His wife looked down with a little grimace.

"The Percivals want us to stay a week with them in September."

"I wish they were dead. There'll be a lot of vapid people who bore me."

"There'll be a lot of charming people who amuse me."

"Can't you go alone?"

"Bobby, I order you to come with me to the Percivals'."

"That settles it," said Bobby. And lunch being over and no servant in the room, he went to his wife and kissed her on the forehead.

A marriage which is the result of an accidental and merely physical attraction on the man's part, and of quiet calculation on the woman's, is occasionally a failure; in Bobby's case it was a tolerable success, if you remember what a compromise the world is. He was a

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quiet man of lazy habit, studious tastes, a sort of hole-and-corner distinction and ten thousand a year, and his most obvious characteristic was a custom of reasonable intercourse. If a person's conversation was agreeable to him, no distinction of age, sex, or reputation was allowed to influence his enjoyment of it. In the course of a day in London he would hold intimate converse with a guardsman, a critic, a scientist, a universally-cut genius, a jockey, a parson, and a chorus-girl. His wife had been the only girl of a house in Scotland where he had stayed a month with an old schoolfellow, and unwonted air and exercise had stirred him from habitual indifference.

With her it was a lucky chance, of which she made the most. She was not, however, at all a wicked person ; on the contrary, she was a very good-natured and straightforward young woman. But good-natured young women, albeit bright and pretty, cannot always get themselves married in modern England, and she, having outlived ideals of girlhood, and come to recognise that material luxuries were to her the

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better part, may be forgiven if she accepted thankfully this good thing the gods sent her. She had her reward.

Bobby never pestered her about intellect, nor sermonised her on frivolity. He loaded her with jewels, and rejoiced in her new dresses, and treated her absorption of the lion's share of his income as a matter of course. She had as much freedom as any modish matron of her acquaintance. On the other hand, his time, except for an occasional dinner and visit, was given to him for his own, and they fell early on a convenient compromise. It was nothing extraordinary that while she was driven by Charley Somebody to Hurlingham, Bobby should visit, in Mecklenburgh Square, a woman she had never seen.

Hilda, this other woman, was a Girton friend of Bobby's sister. She belonged to the early generation of Girton girls, but was in no way typical of it. She had been, in the old days, a well set-up and lively girl, who chaffed and patronised Bobby, then a conceited boy from Balliol.

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He was twenty and she twenty-five. They were friendly and intimate, and as years went on she became a sort of referee to him in many matters intellectual and in some matters emotional, but an object of nothing but friendship—a relation more frequent than is supposed or perhaps desirable. Now he was thirty and she was thirty-five.

Bobby rang the bell and went up a musty staircase to the second floor. He was left a minute to look round the sitting-room, a rather bare room with an uncompromising writing-table, many shelves of books, a few big photographs of statues, a few more or less inviting arm-chairs.

"This is so jolly of you, Mr. Gordon."

Hilda was well set-up as ever, thinner, paler, and with less heartiness in her voice than of old.

"I'm not going to be called Mr. Gordon at my time of life, Hilda——"

"Bobby, of course. It was bourjoyce of me ; I suppose it was your marriage."

"Why on earth that should make any differ-

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ence I don't know. You didn't call me Mr. Gordon when I told you ——"

"You shall never begin a conversation with delicate matters, Bobby; you can't keep it up. Now tell me all the commonplace things that have happened to you since I saw you."

So Bobby talked about his wife, calmly and a little critically. It became clear to Hilda that by this time he simply accepted a position that was not very irksome, nor very full of joys.

"Shall I meet her?" she asked, and Bobby :  
"There wouldn't be much point in it ; you'd only bore one another. You'd think her talk trivial and entirely about people you don't know, and she'd think you uninteresting because you're not in her particular set of idiots. Tell me about yourself : still writing, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes ; writing, writing, writing."

"The same sort of thing?"

"Of course. Reviewing dull books, writing articles about nothing ; sometimes a pot-boiling story. It's easier now, but I get just the same

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sort of work. I suppose at sixty I shall still be reviewing novels. I'm what is called a highly-educated woman, but that is all the work I can get."

"Isn't there anything else?"

"Only teaching, Bobby, which I detest. But never mind me. Have you read ——?" And so on.

Bobby went to Mecklenburgh Square three times a week for a month, and then his wife and he were to leave town. Meantime a development had taken place. He had found that mutual toleration between two people with no tastes nor a single point of view in common, when they two lived in the same house, was not so potent a comforter but that the existence of another woman, whose sympathy with him was certain and whose understanding of him was as perfect as understanding of another can be, led him to chafe in Grosvenor Street. And pity for the dull routine of her life, its unlovely surroundings, its constant prostitution of a fine intelligence to stupid tasks, the lack of friendship in it, and

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the tedium of its acquaintances—this pity gave a quality of warmth and eagerness to old affection.

On the visit which was to be the last of that summer, as she leaned over his chair to point a passage in a book, he drew her down and kissed her. She looked at him sadly and smiled. "One chaste kiss" she quoted and moved impatiently away.

You may care to learn the end of all this. Remember that Bobby and Hilda were people to whom the common ideas of marriage were vulgar prejudices, that he was a reasonable man, and she a tired woman of thirty-five, and do not be uncomfortably shocked at what I have to tell you.

They decided not to interfere with Mrs. Gordon's pleasures and peace ; but Bobby found a delightful house for Hilda in an unknown village in North Italy, and there, when any pretext could procure him a month away, he lived with her, and things went well for a year and a day. Bobby and Hilda congratulated themselves on their reasonableness, and Mrs.



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Gordon was perfectly happy. And then, alas! it became a conviction with Hilda that solitude in North Italy was as tiresome as tedious acquaintances in Mecklenburgh Square, and Bobby, alas ! said he sympathised with it.

So she lives again in Mecklenburgh Square. She thinks that if Mrs. Gordon elopes or dies, Bobby will marry her ; he thinks about it not at all. Friendship, artificially warmed and changed, will cool into friendship again. Things are much as they were before this episode.

## THE TRUE CHIVALRY

REGGIE was—at the time of this episode—a boy of twenty-five, a tall, ordinary boy, of pleasant manners and discursive conversation. He had been my fag at school, came up to my University in my last year, and was elected to my club soon after he came to town. Most people liked him, and he liked most people. He was serviceable in helping to get up amateur theatricals ; beyond that he was quite useless, but quite inoffensive, a companion on whom one could always fall back with security.

Reggie became devoted to a girl a year or two older than himself, a rather clever, rather pretty, rather anæmic, and rather nervous girl, who refused him and married a portly, prosperous, and not too amiable person for reasons unknown

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to me and irrelevant to this episode. A week after the marriage, in the solemnity of three in the morning, Reggie disclosed to my admiration a fine vein of chivalry. He said he would love no other woman, nor ever marry, but devote his existence (as I understood) to waiting on the off-chance of doing some chaste and self-sacrificing thing for this girl. He was really impressive and inarticulately sincere, and I confess to a certain extent I took him seriously, and so, as I discovered, did the girl. Reggie takes himself, in this connection, seriously still.

You will doubtless say that the episode I am to relate is what the jargon of the day calls "cynical," one showing "that no loves endure." It may be so, but Reggie thinks it is no instance of that, but a triumph of enlightened and self-sacrificing benevolence over unreasoning and self-defeating emotion: the terms will not bear psychological analysis, but the meaning is tolerably plain.

A year or so after the marriage I have mentioned, I met Reggie at Piccadilly Circus

### *The True Chivalry*

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and walked with him to his rooms in Park Street, discoursing as we went. It was in the late autumn, and the afternoon, and as we turned from Bond Street into Grosvenor Street we were aware of the remains of a stormy sunset, and Mayfair had that indefinable romance, that suggestion of Georgian days and distinct sexes, which it always has in the twilight, and Reggie fell to discoursing on love.

He used a form of speech which is a compromise between a naturally communicative nature and the national ideal of reserve, a form of speech in which particular experiences are stated as general propositions. Thus Reggie would ask me : "Why is it, when a woman knows she can do what she likes with a man, she despises him?" and I knew that he was, or fancied himself, the victim of somebody's contempt. As general observations, these remarks were as true as their opposites; as fragments of a character, they had a certain interest.

In the Square we fell in with a pretty, lively-looking woman, who stopped Reggie and asked

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him about some commission she had given him. He answered eagerly, and she treated him with a sort of patronising familiarity. When we went on, Reggie fell into gloom and was tedious.

When we reached his rooms it was too dark to see plainly, but I noticed a letter lying on a table. He took it up and glanced at it, and then sat down on the hearthrug to read it by the light of the fire. With his frock-coat, and his long legs stretched out, and the letter held close to his nose, Reggie was not a romantic picture, and his sudden exclamation amused me. "Damn!" he said, "this comes of chivalry!" There is little humour in Reggie, and therefore his remark was entertaining. "I wonder," he went on, "if I shall be a perfectly hopeless cad if I tell you about it?"

I saw, of course, that he was longing to tell me, and though I knew I despised him for doing so, yet since I was in a mood when nothing seems to matter, and one's own delicacy seems especially ridiculous, I let him do so.

### *The True Chivalry*

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"I won't mention names," he said, and looked into the fire to avoid my smile. "Once—a long time ago—I cared a great deal for a woman: you don't know her: I've never mentioned her name to you." I have seldom despised any one so much. "Well, she married—don't you know?—and I told her if I could ever be of service to her, she could command me to any extent. Well, now she writes. Don't for a moment suppose that I don't still mean what I said to her. But she says she's unhappy, and that sort of thing, and wants to consult me on a very grave matter, and so on. Now, I know her husband's a very decent sort of chap in his way, and tries to make her happy and that sort of thing, and I rather think she's a little inclined to be hysterical, you know, and all that. She asks me to go to her—she'll be alone—at nine to-night. Now, as a friend, do you advise me to go?"

"What," I asked, "was the name of the woman we met in Grosvenor Square to-day?"

"What the hell has that to do with it? My

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dear chap, do for God's sake be serious : I look on you as a friend."

I told him, sarcastically, not to go, and so he went.

That night he came to me about eleven.

"Well, old man," he said with portentous gaiety, "what have you been doing?"

Presently he told me what had happened.

"I was really very anxious—don't you know?—to help her, and that, and who do you think was the first person I saw when I was shown into the cursed little drawing-room? Yes, of course—her husband. He said a thing he was going to had been put off unexpectedly. We talked about commonplace things, and about ten she said she was tired and would go to bed. Well, as I opened the door for her—he wouldn't let me go—she asked if I'd go to-morrow, and I said I was going out of town. Why do you look like that? You see, her husband's really awfully good to her: we played billiards together afterwards, and he's really a very good chap. It isn't my business, you know. Besides

### *The True Chivalry*

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one would only make things worse by interfering ; for her own sake, the best thing I could do was to keep away. The truest chivalry is not always to go blundering about trying to put things right, but sometimes to defend people against themselves."

He soon was praising the woman we had met in Grosvenor Square.



## PETER SANDERSON'S PASSION

AT twenty-eight, Peter Sanderson was generally spoken of as a *dilettante* young man about town. That is to say, although he dressed well, had a charming flat in Park Place, and went occasionally to race meetings, he did not keep racers; although he haunted theatres and was seen at dress rehearsals, he did not finance an actress or write a play; although a critic of books and pictures, of wide and miscellaneous knowledge and happy phrases, he had never painted a picture or published a line. A century and a half ago he would have been called a wit, would have drawn out George Selwyn at White's, and

gone curiosity-hunting with Horace Walpole ; he would have been extremely nervous in the society of Dr. Johnson, and delighted to pay the score at the "Cheshire Cheese." His own opinion was that there were too many people doing things in the world, and that being a rich man he filled a not altogether useless place in the scheme of things as an intelligent idler. As a matter of fact he had never a moment to spare : young men consulted him in their troubles, dissolute men sent him to interview intractable ladies, and women of all sorts sent him on all sorts of errands. His relaxation from idling was chemistry.

At twenty-eight Peter Sanderson became a slave to passion. So far he had been a saunterer. He himself fancied he had "lost love's rose" by reason of his too early experiences of love's weeds. A succession of careless, mercenary loves was his emotional history in this particular, a series growing more careless and intermittent with his years. He had never been exiled or exiled himself from women

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and girls of his own class—had in fact lived pretty constantly in their society. But no one of them, not even any contemporary of his mother, had inspired him with mad wishes. I suppose the fact to have been that the sort of feeling which is a mixture of desire and affection and esteem in strong degrees, had to fashion a slow path through the obstacles of facile satisfaction. He was saved from or cheated out of, as you like, the mistaken impulses of calf-love, the simple self-deceptions of green youth. But when the feeling aforesaid made its way to the light, it appeared full-blown, based on admitted impulse, and rising to heights which no sense of humour in the possessor could make ridiculous.

The woman who inspired it was of about his own age. She was a tall, lithe woman, good at lawn tennis. Your recollection of her usually included a tailor-made dress that fitted admirably, a very upright carriage and an easy, graceful movement. Her intellect was disciplined and ready, and the bent of it scien-

*Peter Sanderson's Passion*

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tific. She had been educated beyond most of the crazes or movements of the moment, and remarked of the woman's question that most of its professors went at a tangent from a misconception of its physical basis. She herself was content to accept a gradual development, and in her own conduct to strike a happy average, which should please all sensible people. If she recognised a duty, social, filial, or any other, she performed it ungrudgingly, as though she liked it; when she could, she exacted the like from other people. If her maid were "in trouble" she would have taken infinite pains to see her through it; if the same maid were lazy, she would dismiss her without hesitation. The motive of the conduct of such a character is, I suppose, a sort of higher vanity; in this case self-esteem was justified. She was a serviceable woman, good and sane to talk to, and cheerful with whom to live. She argued coherently, and could not have written a passable novel. I never heard anybody but Peter Sanderson say she was handsome.

### *Episodes*

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This woman did not return his passion. His decidedly ugly face and slight, unimposing figure had probably little to do with that : she despised his manners and customs. She liked bold, authoritative men, showing it may be thereby the accidental nature of her own masculinity. Peter was gentle and deferential ; but above all, Peter was a professional idler, and she liked professionally busy men. She had not been educated beyond the idea that every man ought to have a purpose in life, which should be expressed in definite achievement. Peter's theory of the social usefulness of intelligent idling was to her utterly contemptible. Unfortunately she did not like him well enough to tell him so. Very frank to those who engaged the least of her sympathies, to Peter she was scrupulously polite. She was aware of the place she occupied in his life, and I question if it even flattered her vanity. She was bored, and would have liked to avoid him. But they lived in much the same set, and she could not help seeing a good deal of him.

*Peter Sanderson's Passion*

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They were on that footing of superficial familiarity which is often the greatest bar in the world to real intimacy. Unfortunately, also, Peter's passion and awe made him comparatively tongue-tied—not tongue-tied as a boy is, under stress of tense feeling, but unable to bring his brain into conversation with her. He might have seemed to her a very capable and well-instructed man, who needed only the impulse she could give him to achieve what she would have thought a work worth doing: as a fact he seemed to her a conventional trifle.

The man she married was a loud-voiced, determined man, who had written a book of history which a set of writers was always quoting. I do not know how it was done, but if you read an article by X, or Y, or Z, you might rely on reading, "As Mr. So-and-so tells us in his admirable, etc."; in his own articles, which were many, you found quotations from X and Y and Z. He blew his trumpet confidently wherever he went; few people liked him, but many were

## *Episodes*

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impressed. Of these was Peter Sanderson's lady, for here was a man who had done something, and was admitted to have done something by the world. Peter Sanderson called him an advertising cad. If the description was right, she was deceived, for his voice did not jar upon her, and his jokes seemed the graceful unbending of a great mind. He may or may not have loved her ; certainly he was at no disadvantage in her society. He argued with her a good deal, and brought authorities to bear whom she did not know. Certainly, though, she was an heiress in a modest way. When he got his Chair at a Scotch University he asked her to marry him. She refused, and he bore the refusal like a man. She changed her mind ; they were married and went to Scotland together.

Peter Sanderson did not become a monomaniac. He went on errands as before for a time, and was as much at everybody's service. But gradually he withdrew himself from the world behind the footlights, and worked harder at chemistry. His passion showed its strength

*Peter Sanderson's Passion*

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in that the bitterness of having missed his happiness through a woman's impatience and ill-judgment (as he naturally thought) was altogether merged in the dull sorrow of deprivation. If a cab knocks you down and breaks your leg, you are too much hurt to abuse the driver.

Peter spent much of the year at his place alone, and lost much of his popularity in his county by refusing invitations. He worked in his laboratory or mooned about the park, and would lie for hours on his back looking up at the sky. He did not think incessantly about the woman he had missed; he was really keen in his study of chemistry. But he felt that the great chance of his life had miscarried, and rejected the idea of other women. He lived this life for three years, going rarely to London. And then on a day in spring his blood stirred in him, and he perceived that he was bored and wanted society. He had been engaged in a controversy with a great man, who, being a modest and a good-natured man as



## *Episodes*

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well, had publicly complimented Peter, who was thereby elated. His friends, of course, treated the matter as a joke, declining to believe that Peter had shown any real scientific capacity; but other men of science had written to him, and in the face of these letters his theory of idleness was given up. Peter was elated, felt vigorous and bold, and naturally he would carry his plumes to some woman. He put the idea of the woman he had missed away from him.

The next day Peter Sanderson went up to town, and went straight to see a woman who had always been an ally of his, a woman married to his greatest friend. But she was not at home, and Peter re-entered his cab a little dejected and told the man to drive to Park Place. His look was undecided, and he seemed to be trying to make up his mind. A very pretty girl in a cab that met his own looked into his face, and they two exchanged that embrace of the eyes which, when one is fairly young and healthy and a trifle amorous, is of the most charming of life's minor pleasures. Peter gave another

address to his cabman. In a few minutes a door was opened to him by a very smart maid, who welcomed him with a grin.

"Madame still lives here, then?"

"Oh yes, Monsieur. And there is no one just now—she is alone, quite alone. . . . Madame, here is Monsieur Sanderson come back!"

A sweet little woman, in a sweet little fluffy gown, jumped up from a sofa.

"But, my dear, it is years—years!"

She put her hands on his shoulders, looked at him with innocent blue eyes, and held up her face to be kissed. Peter had found what he wanted for the moment.

Meantime, things had not been well with the woman who went to Scotland. Her disillusioning was very swift. She found her husband not dull, but limited and shallow. She had mistaken the knowledge of a specialist for the brains of a man of intellect. She came to understand the incessant advertisement, the coarse poses, the audacious system of puffs. His knowledge of his subject had justified those who chose him

### *Episodes*

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for his Chair, but he was not respected in that Scotch University. He was a man with real knowledge in a certain limited field, whose object was to be accepted as a great man all round : an object transparent and contemptible to many people. She wearied of his dozen jokes, and the dozen stories designed to illustrate indirectly his own importance and the extent of his acquaintance. Even the little eccentricities of dress, which had charmed her when she thought them a result of careless indifference to little things, disgusted her when she perceived they were introduced for a calculated effect. His manners fell off in domestic life ; he was selfish and imperceptive. After a few arguments, in which she had the advantage, on general things, he snubbed her reading and any attempt at rational conversation, and told her that her business in life was to advance his interests.

Now when an ordinary woman of an old type is disgusted with her husband, she can commonly bring herself to endure the married state. This woman was of a type that is not

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new but is still uncommon. With her disgust for her husband took a violently physical shape, and to her the married state was loathsome. She might have found content in children if she had had any, but even this I doubt ; it is not so rare as may be supposed for this disgust to react on them. She felt herself losing touch with her world, though of course, she visited it from time to time. A literary scandal, in which her husband was shown up as (to put it mildly) an impostor, made the visits uncomfortable, and she was thrown back upon the society of a man whose knowledge was half and whose brains were a third of hers ; on him and people, some of whom she liked or respected, but who neither had her traditions nor cared to gain her sympathy. She thought wistfully of her world, away in the North, and somehow the recollection of Peter Sanderson formed part of her musings. She thought wistfully of his delicacy and social tact, and good nature, and she regretted. Then in time she read the controversy with the great man about that question

### *Episodes*

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of chemistry, and one day, when she had read the great man's recognition of the unknown man's contribution to science, she very nearly cried. All this did not make her in love with her memory of him, but had they met at this time they would have understood one another, and who knows what would have followed? She told herself plainly that she owed no duty to her husband.

It was three days after Peter Sanderson had renewed his acquaintance with Blanchette, that he came out of a little club in York Street, St. James's. It was then in its brief period of fashionable wickedness, and Peter had been there to order a late supper. He turned into St. James's Square, and saw a carriage waiting outside the London Library, and as he passed it was aware of a woman he knew sitting in it, a woman whose face was tired and who sat very upright. She spoke his name, and he went to the side of the carriage.

She spoke lightly of her married life, and congratulated him on the great man's eulogy.

*Peter Sanderson's Passion*

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Peter, remembering old times, thought she was sarcastic. She had not the female tact to make him understand, as millions of ordinary women would have been able to make him, that she thought differently of him now, and hoped he still thought as he had once thought of her.

"I'm staying with my aunt—the aunt you know. I go back to Scotland to-morrow. Have you anything to do to-night? Will you come and dine? Only two old women, but if you've nothing to do——"

What was it spurred Peter Sanderson to refuse this invitation? He was not yet tired of Blanchette. He had sunk for a time back to an old stratum of existence. It was unwise, he said instinctively, to drift back into adoration of this woman. He was well out of it; he would fly from the temptation. In any case, Peter refused. The footman came out with some books and she drove away.

Peter walked back to his rooms, regretting more and more. The old magic was working in him. The face was continuously in his

### *Episodes*

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sight. He sat in his rooms saying to himself with increasing difficulty that he was right. When the time came to dress, he was on the verge of going after all. But no; that would be ridiculous and rude; she would snub him, probably.

He kept his engagement with Blanchette, and had a violent quarrel with her. The next morning he went to call upon the woman whom he, once more, worshipped exclusively; she was gone to Scotland, and Peter went back to the country that afternoon.

She was gone to Scotland, and two months later was killed by an accident in the street.

Peter Sanderson will be either a cynical and querulous old man, or a sentimental and amiable. I am persuaded that if he had gone to dinner that night with the woman who had called up the one real passion of his life, she would not have gone back to Scotland. But, you see, the psychological moment found him unready.

## A SPOILED IDEAL

AT about eleven o'clock one evening in the early spring of last year, two men came out of a club in St. James's Street, and stood talking at the bottom of the steps.

"By the way," said one, "I want to ask you—Do you find it amusing, being married?"

"More or less," said the other. "Why?"

"You're sure? I mean quite apart from your wife and all that, of course. Do you find the mere fact of being married—the new element, the difference from not being married—do you find it a really decided sort of sensation, one that you don't get accustomed to all at once? I'll walk to the bottom of the street with you. You see," he continued, taking his friend's arm, "of course one has had all the experiences of marriage, except those that come from the



## *Episodes*

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name of the thing—its recognition by the world. Now, what I want to know is : is that amusing? When you're the host, with your wife at the other end of the table, when you refer to her in conversation, and so on—is all that enough to give you a really new sensation, a feeling that you're a different person from what you used to be?"

"It's rather difficult to speak for another man—in my case, certainly."

"Oh, we're pretty much alike." The other man smiled. "If it amuses you, it's pretty sure to amuse me. So far all one's pleasure has been in disregarding conventions. I'm thinking of trying what pleasure they themselves can give one. A new experience, that's all. As one goes on in life it might be a more artistic point of departure. You understand?"

"Oh, of course. Who is she?"

"I'm not quite sure. I'll tell you all right before it comes off. Good-night, old man."

"Good-night."

The man who had stated his views of mar-

riage strolled up the street and turned into Piccadilly, walking slowly and glancing at every one he met. He was slight and well set-up, with rather small and delicate features. When he came to Bolton Street he stopped and looked up. It was a fresh evening ; there was a bright moon, and the wind blew little light clouds across the sky. He looked keenly at a passing hansom and shook his head. A woman accosted him ; he spoke pleasantly to her, and sent her away laughing. The third hansom seemed to please him, and he hailed it with the slightest possible jerk of the head. "Drive," he said, "to the end of Kensington Gardens, and then drive back again." He settled himself deliberately, and lit a fresh cigar from the one he was smoking. If you suppose he intended to meditate on marriage or any woman, you wrong him. He intended simply to take the fresh air, and to enjoy the lines of lamps and the effect of trees by night. When the cab brought him back to Bolton Street, he stopped it half-way up the street, and took out his latch-

## *Episodes*

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key. The room he entered was not remarkable ; it was in good taste and comfortable. " They are like every other stray man's rooms ; if they were not, one would get sick of them in a week," he used to say to the few intimates who knew that his life and tastes were not those of any other stray man. An envelope was lying on a table : he looked at it and put it down. Then he went into his bedroom and came out in a smoking coat and slippers. He turned up a lamp, drew an armchair under it, lit a pipe, sat down, and proceeded to look at the photograph which the envelope contained. It was a photograph of a girl he half thought of marrying.

From the time that he was twenty until now that he was thirty-five, he had never done anything that he did not like doing. When a book failed to interest him he put it down ; when an acquaintance bored him he dropped it. He remained nowhere if he felt inclined to go anywhere else, and outraged no convention if it suited him to conform to it. He had several

### *A Spoiled Idea*

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intellectual interests which he had never studied thoroughly, and several artistic instincts which he gratified casually. He had financed an actress and manageress who only talked to him about her servants, and he had refused to elope with an extremely clever and beautiful woman of whom he was really fond. It was a question of mood, he said. He was well-born and rich, and his relations had refused to quarrel with him. A man not without affections, he was used to men in his set dying ; not without passions, it was some years since passion had given him pain. He was not in the least brutal in his attitude towards women : when they interested him intellectually, he listened to them ; when physically, he made love to them ; when they did both, he did both. The curse of his life and his temperament, he used to say, was reasonableness.

He looked hard at the photograph. It was a pretty face, and rather an odd one ; the forehead more prominent than is usual in pretty women, and the mouth a little larger. There was a

faint look of derision about the lips and the nostrils.

The thoughts that flitted across the man's brain were, among others, that he attracted the girl because of certain intellectual phases and because he sympathised unobtrusively with her; probably she would marry him, chiefly because she loathed her home. For his part he thought her the ideal of a type, and a type he liked, a type of woman that combined intellect and gaiety and dissipation—not essentially modern, after all. Accepting her as the ideal of a type, he accepted everything she chose to do or say. She would be interesting as a wife. He looked harder at the photograph, and being rather theatrical when alone, shrugged his shoulders.

At the same moment, half a mile away, the original of the photograph stamped her foot and said "damn," and cut short her mother's lecture on vulgarity by going to her own room. There she sat in an armchair and read the last realistic novel, which after a while she threw away. She sat up uncomfortably at her writing-table and

### *A Spoiled Ideal*

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read Schopenhauer, whom presently she shut with a bang. She sent for her maid, spoke kindly to her, and sent her to bed. Then she took from the shelf a girl's book she had read when she was twelve, and went to her bedroom. Suddenly, as she read in bed, she turned out the gas over her head and began to cry.

You see, when a girl is very intellectual and has a sensual strain in her, and has thought sexual conventions ridiculous, and has defied them secretly, and the man could not marry her until his uncle died, and he went away to Africa, and was assegaied, and she finds herself at twenty-seven with a past and a detested home, and but a few random fancies—her mind is apt to go back to the days when the conventions were unquestioned, and she feels sorry for herself and cries.

The next day came a man proposing marriage. He was not our friend, but quite a different sort of man. He was a rising barrister, with his eye on a constituency, and was pronounced a good sort of chap by his friends. He had gained

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distinguished honours at the University, and written articles in monthly reviews. He had a number of views and principles, and was much admired by his father.

Ages ago he had been a young man.

They two met first at a philosophical society, and came to have long conversations about abstractions, and he fell in love in an ordinary way, with a measure of desire and something of affection. Part of her was somewhat attracted by him : she admired his intellect, and found his calm strength and definiteness refreshing. Part of her was altogether unknown to him ; he knew nothing of the little graces and social cynicisms, nothing of the suppers and epigrams and stories.

He came proposing marriage. Now, on that day she was experiencing a reaction from the cosmopolitan and tolerant man, and was dissatisfied and very honest.

"I can't give you an answer now. . . . You have done me a great honour. . . . There is something you have a right to know. . . ."

### *A Spoiled Ideal*

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As she told him of the man who was assegaied, and what had happened before, her listener's silent repugnance made itself felt by her, and she, who had begun so boldly, broke down. Then he spoke—tediously, you would think. I suppose you would call him a gentleman, but he was really very solemn. Certainly he thought himself heroic in formally renewing his proposal of marriage.

\* \* \* \*

“You had better,” said the cosmopolitan man, “tell me what’s the matter. Very likely I shall not be able to help you much. But I think I should sympathise ; and one thing you know, nothing you can have possibly done—you say you have committed a dreadful crime or something—can make me respect you less than I do, which is as much as I can respect anybody. I mean that solemnly, but don’t make me repeat it.”

“I feel reckless ; I may as well. I must tell somebody, and you understand me better than



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anybody. You remember how you laughed at that case the other day, and said people made an artificial enormity of what was innocent and unimportant."

"In our present stage of civilisation—yes."

"Well—well, years ago——"

"You mean——?"

"The only thing possible. Don't make me regret having told you."

The man had sat up suddenly in his chair.

"Is he dead, or what?"

"He is dead."

"Does anybody know?"

"Nobody in the world but you—and one other man."

"Who is that?"

"Somehow I don't want to go on now; it is that that makes me really mad with rage. It's nobody you know, no one in your set. But he asked me to marry him, and I had a fit of honesty and told him, and he—— Oh, it makes me mad."

### *A Spoiled Ideal*

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"I see. He 'remembered of what race he was,' and held forth. I can quite understand it was tiresome. By the way, is he what is called a gentleman? I presume, of course, by your telling him——"

"Oh, yes. He will act as if he had never heard it. But I can't marry him. He seemed to pity me. I wonder how far people like you and me are sincere."

The cosmopolitan man had leaned back again in his chair and was looking at his cigarette.

"Don't let's talk about him, please. He represents a sort of canting magnanimity which is simply disgusting. As for what you told me, of course it's insignificant, except so far as it has given you pain. You must have always had the temperament; the expression of it is pure accident. Yes, we are sincere in this. The absurdity of the fuss people make about these matters is one of those things that, once seen, are never forgotten. But there's

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another question. I suppose by your telling that chap, you had some idea of marrying?"

"I can't live at home ; I won't be a hospital nurse. I—you understand?"

"Yes. It is a matter of arrangement and convenience. Well, since it is that, and you've given up this other marriage, I have a suggestion. If it wouldn't bore you too much, I should like you to marry me."

\* \* \* \*

Two days afterwards he had a letter. He opened it complacently and was really surprised :

"No, I shall marry him and shall not marry you. You may think me a fool and a treacherous brute. But I don't think you will care much. I cannot explain all the reasons. For all his sermonising, he never asked if the world knew, as you did before you made light of it. I daresay you were sincere, but you took it too carelessly. You see I am absolutely feminine and illogical. Don't expostulate—I have given

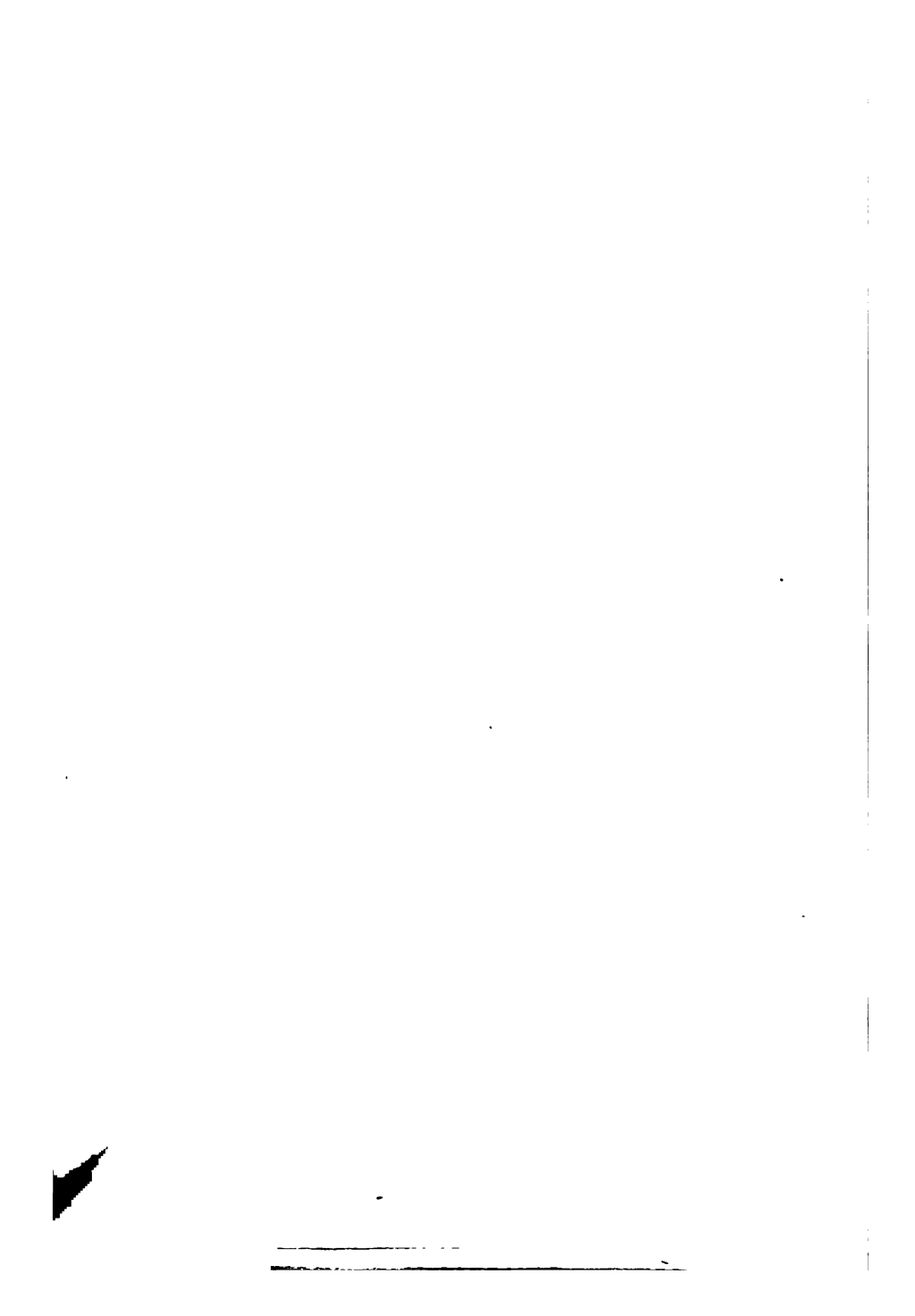
*A Spoiled Ideal*

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him his answer, and you would be in a foolish light. I have chosen a humdrum part; you will not care to keep up the acquaintance. Good-bye."

He no longer thinks her the ideal of a type.

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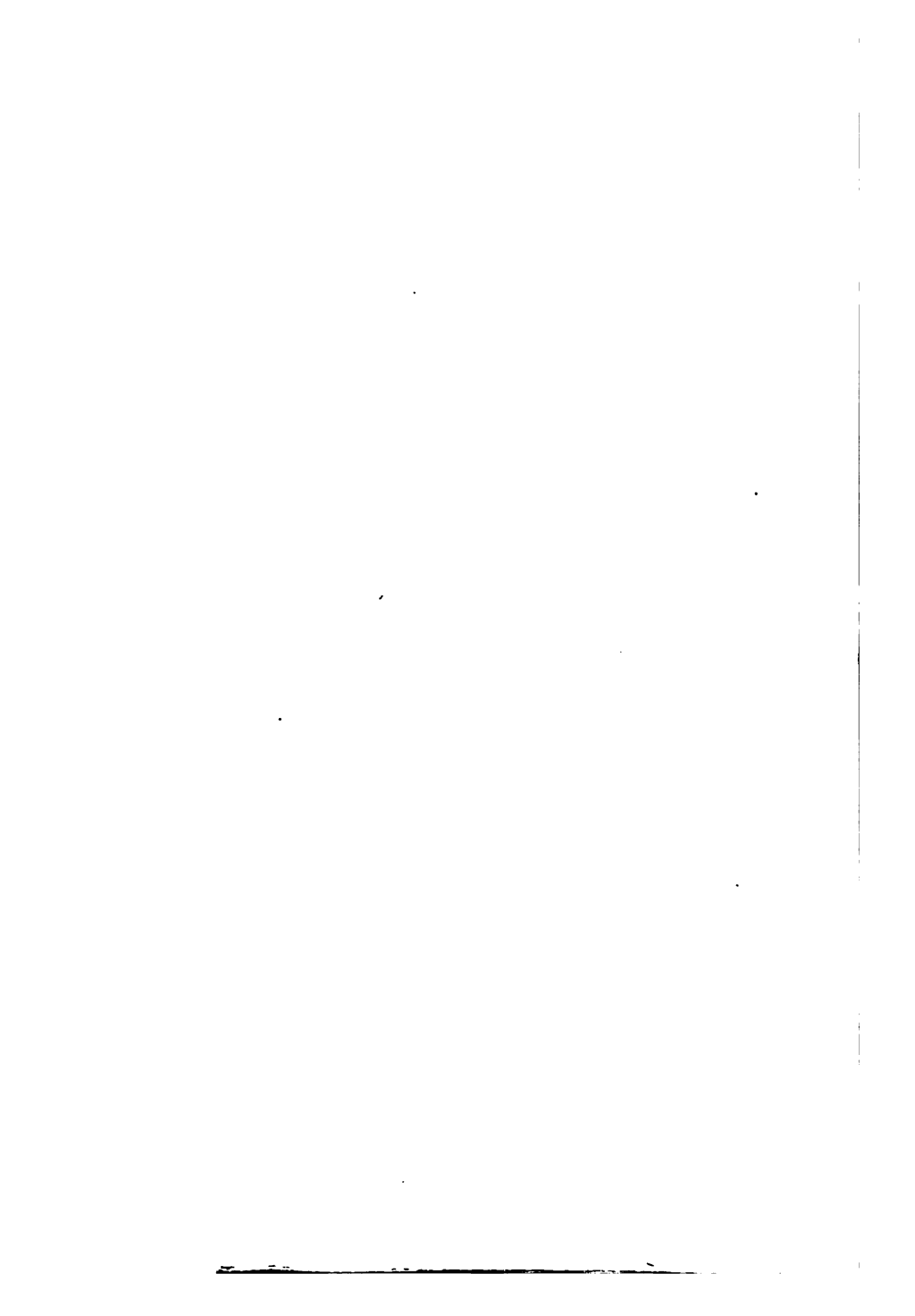
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